

**THE RELIGION OF
EVELYN HASTINGS**

By the same Author.

LIFE OF MY HEART.

(30th Edition.)

SIX CHAPTERS OF A MAN'S LIFE

(40th Edition.)

TO-MORROW?

(22nd Edition.)

PAULA.

(17th Edition.)

A GIRL OF THE KLONDIKE.

(10th Edition.)

THE RELIGION OF EVELYN HASTINGS

BY
VICTORIA CROSS,

AUTHOR OF
SIX CHAPTERS OF A MAN'S LIFE, "TO-MORROW!"
"LIFE OF MY HEART," "PAULA," ETC.

*"PRAY, AND IT SHALL BE ANSWERED
UNTO YOU."*



London and Telling-on-Tyne:
THE WALTER SCOTT PUBLISHING CO., LTD.
NEW YORK 23 EAST 14TH STREET

Dedicated

TO THOSE

WHOSE CRY IS

"LORD, I BELIEVE; HELP THOU MINE UNBELIEF."

NOTE.

IN the following pages I have given some of my own experiences in the realms of thought and prayer.

The prologue is the simple relation of an incident in my own life. By additions and embellishments I might have made it more dramatic and interesting. I preferred to preserve its absolute truth.

I am not one of those who wish to believe and cannot. I am rather one who would not believe, but am obliged to. And if my relation of the incident in the prologue can help those to whom I dedicate this book to the belief they desire, as it has forced me into the belief I did not desire, I shall feel I have not made it public in vain.

Having naturally a leaning towards material-

Note

ism, and this, to me, inexplicable incident being a stumbling-block in my path towards materialistic belief, I shall be pleased and relieved if any materialist can explain it on purely materialistic grounds. If any one can so explain it, that he should communicate with me is the earnest wish of

THE AUTHOR.

January, 1905.

PROLOGUE.

A LITTLE child ran down the street to the sea. She ~~was~~ sturdy and well-built, and her bare legs were firm and tanned above her white socks. A merry, bright, brown face shone above her white frock, and beneath the light gold hair cut square upon her forehead. On her arm swung her bucket and spade as she trotted along towards the beach with eager steps. She felt so light-hearted that morning. For the first time in many months, Ada, her widowed mother's ward, had been able to sit up brightly at the breakfast-table, and eat with a good appetite, and smile and talk. All through the dreary winter and spring in London, the little girl Evelyn had been oppressed by the atmosphere of sickness and melancholy in the big house in which they lived. Her

Prologue

mother always seemed sad, and a doctor came and went continually. Evelyn had heard people say that Ada was dying. Dying—all that time.

Then the doctor had suddenly ordered them away from town, and they had come down the day before. It had been a terrible journey, and Ada had been carried into the house in a chair; but this morning, what a change! Ada seemed well, and mamma looked happy. The doctor had said Ada would be so much better by the sea, and it seemed as if the recovery had begun already. It was a lovely morning. Such a blue sky, and floods of golden sunshine pouring in through the open windows. After breakfast she had seen Ada put into a large chair by the window, with a smile in her eyes, and a flush on her beautiful face. Evelyn thought how lovely and how well she looked. She herself had been given permission to go and play upon the sands till luncheon; and nodding and smiling good-bye to Ada, she had run

Prologue

out rejoicing, in high spirits, for a long morning by the sea.

It was early yet; there was no one about in the little sleepy seaside town. The street was quite empty, full of dancing sunlight, and the blue sea lay sparkling at the end of it. She was eager, with all the excitement of the town child, to get to work at the edge of the water. She would build a castle and there should be a deep ditch round, dug by her own large new spade. She reached the end of the street, wholly absorbed in her plans for the morning's labours, and clambered up a low stone wall to get on the parade. There was a slope on to it, a little farther on, but Evelyn was too eager to get to her play to use that, and being sound and strong and healthy, she enjoyed scrambling over the wall. There was no living being on the parade. She was the first out apparently, and had the place to herself. The air was singularly pure and fresh, not a breath of wind stirred it. The quivering sunlight lay all over

Prologue

the lonely beach: The sea was very calm, and the little waves plashed almost soundless on the sand. Evelyn, her heart singing for joy, raced across the parade, and then took a flying jump off the edge to the beach below, laughing as the pebbles flew in all directions. Then she ran to the water's edge. The tide ~~was~~ going down; here and there a lovely strip of brown sand was exposed, firm and hard and fascinating. Evelyn looked seriously about her, wholly engrossed in the task of selecting the most eligible site for her castle. Finally she chose a place the little rippling waves had just left, and was soon industriously digging the trench. She pushed her sailor-hat far back on her head, till the elastic cut under her chin, and bent forward digging with much energy, her long light curls hanging over both shoulders. As she dug she planned out the castle and decided, to further strengthen it, she would put white stones all round the trench. She would go up to the beach and gather them as soon as she had

Prologue

finished it, and she dug her hardest, leaning her foot on the spade to push it in, as she had seen the gardeners do. She was deeply interested and wholly wrapped-up in her digging just then. All at once, quite suddenly she stopped. She felt a curious sensation. Her heart beat and something within her said suddenly:

"You must go home."

She raised herself fully and stared round. She was utterly alone. The air was singularly still and translucent. The sunny beach was on every side—empty. Besides, she had not exactly heard anything. The voice was inside her, not outside. Yet it was more, perhaps,—a feeling than a voice. A very strong thought as it were. And even as she stood there bewildered, it rushed upon her again:

"You must go back at once, something dreadful is happening at your house. Go back."

What was it? She heard those words uttered, and yet not with her ears. It was a voice

Prologue

speaking outside her will and consciousness, but yet within her. At the same time she felt swayed, influenced, as if some one were pushing her.

A little startled and frightened, the sturdy Saxon child planted her feet firmly on the damp sand and laughed out loud.

"What nonsense!" she said, to herself defiantly. "Voices speaking to one! how mamma would laugh at me! I am not going home."

Still, she returned to the beloved trench. She had just dug out one large spadeful, when the rushing sense of some one commanding her came again. The voice spoke within her again, more importunate, more demanding. It was not angry: "Go back, go home, you are wanted there! You must go back!"

Evelyn stopped and once more looked round. Air, sun, and sea were all calm and tranquil: they seemed to smile upon her. She grew angry.

"It's absurd, it's ridiculous," she broke out,

Prologue

"it's rubbish—the idea of having such fancies! I won't take any notice of it."

She recommenced digging furiously, but she could not continue. Something seemed holding her, compelling her, pushing her.

"Go back, something dreadful is happening. Make haste, make haste!" came the admonition. She was swept suddenly by a sense that she had to obey, and seized by a panic of conviction, she snatched up her spade and bucket and fled up the steep sunny beach towards the parade. Something, some one seemed urging her to speed, to make haste, and her usual self rebelled as she ran. "It's absurd," she muttered mechanically; "I shall find nothing, of course, when I get there."

"You must hasten, you will be too late!" came the command.

Evelyn had reached the parade. It was high above the beach, but in places the beach rose high under it. At one of these Evelyn, flying before the commanding voice, threw herself

Prologue

forward on to the parade and scrambled up the stony side on to it with her knees, cutting them so that the blood ran from them. Breathless she got to her feet, and, still grasping the spade and bucket, fled across the parade, jumped to the road, and ran up the street.

"Quick, you will be too late!" She ran her hardest Up, up the sunny street she went, thinking all the time it was absurd to run so desperately. How would she explain it, when she reached them at home and of course there would be nothing. . . .

She had reached her own house in the row of bay-windowed houses, and springing up the two steps, she glanced through the open side-window into the cheerful room. A great cry came from the child, then she stood white and transfixed on the steps. Death was in that room, and she felt it, in that blinding, terrible moment of her childish life.

Huddled up on the sofa lay Ada, convulsed in her dying struggle. Evelyn saw her mother

Prologue

bending in agonised despair over her, and supporting on her arm Ada's head bent backward. Evelyn saw the face perfectly—a beautiful and much loved face, with both blue lips drawn tightly back from a clenched ring of perfect teeth.

She had never seen any one die, but that was death she knew. Ada was dying. That one glance was all, but the scene in its horror and terror was painted indelibly on her mind. Years and years after, Evelyn could see that picture in every detail before her eyes. The room, the bending figure, the dying girl, the beautiful distorted face, the mouth tortured by death.

The next instant Evelyn burst open the door, passed through the hall, and entered the room. A tall woman, the landlady, stood near the door, and as she came in, the woman took her roughly but not unkindly by the shoulders.

"This is no place for you, miss," she said;

Prologue

and though Evelyn struggled and begged to remain, she pushed her firmly out of the room, across the passage, and putting her into an empty bedroom on the other side, shut and locked the door upon her.

The child stood in the silence of the room staring, wondering. She was face to face now with a question that would be with her all her life. What was that voice? What was that influence which had swayed her on the beach? She stood there, still mechanically grasping the spade and bucket—puzzled, terrified, bewildered. Who had sent her that message on the beach, how had it come, what was it?

Evelyn knew something of the Bible; she had been taken to Church, and knew the ordinary Christian conception of God. She had heard how God spoke to Moses. Had God spoken now to her? God was not real to the child, even less real than to many. She had not been brought up religiously, for her

Prologue

mother was ~~not~~ a religious woman. An observer of the ordinary outward forms, she was a materialist at heart, and Evelyn had often heard her speak with delicate mockery of belief, of religion, of the soul, everything in fact that was not material. But Evelyn had given no thought to any of these things, being a strong, healthy child, engrossed in its play and fond of its outdoor rambles, and exercising its growing limbs.

But now what was this? This must have a meaning, a significance, an explanation. What was it? How should she find it. Although only a child, she could think clearly and intelligently. She had a good capacity for thought, and she thought now, calling out all the slender supplies of knowledge and experience she possessed.

God was supposed to speak to men occasionally. The Bible said so. There were instances given. God had called Samuel. She remembered the story of Samuel, and

Prologue

she turned it over and over ~~now~~ in her mind. Then there was Sarah, to whom angels spoke, and Balaam; there was Joseph, counselled in a dream; there was the hand that wrote the writing on Belshazzar's wall.

Evelyn recalled these stories, but remembered how she had heard even religious people refer to them as "myths." She remembered her mother's supercilious smile when relating these tales to her, and her frequent caution that the Bible was an estimable history, but not to be taken literally. Musty records, thousands of years old, however interesting, must not be implicitly believed. And now, here, to Evelyn herself, on this sunny morning, something very like these stories, something parallel to these tales, had actually happened.

She looked down at her sandy toys, at her damp shoes. She had been digging, and so happy on the sand. But she had been spoken to, she had been compelled to come home, against her own desires. It would have been

Prologue

a strange experience, even if she had found nothing unusual when she had returned. But she had. She had found Death. The message that had been sent her, had been true. The voice that summoned her had been justified. But how, how, how had the communication been made to her? "Something dreadful is happening at your house," she remembered the phrase quite well, she would remember it, as long as she lived. She had not been told what it was. No idea had flashed into her mind of the truth. Ada's death; that Ada whom she had seen so well that morning, was dying! That was the farthest of all from her thoughts. The vagueness of the message seemed as if some one who would spare her, were breaking the tidings gently to her.

Then a new idea came to her. Was it the struggling spirit of the girl just set free that had come itself to Evelyn? Was it Ada herself who had flown to her side and urged her to return? The face that Evelyn had

Prologue

seen through the open window had been the face of death. The spirit had passed away already before; whither? perhaps, perhaps through that pellucid air to Evelyn on the beach. That was its last influence on earth, perhaps its last power, before it was lost, dissipated, or transported. Was it this? was this the explanation?

Ada would wish her to go back to comfort her mother. Ada's last thought would be the agony of the loved one left behind.

Evelyn still stood motionless, awed and oppressed. Outside she heard the sound of violent, terrible weeping, and of many feet.

Ada, whom she had loved as a sister, was dead. But the child could not cry, could not feel. She was absorbed in the wonder of existence. The Voice had spoken to her once; would it ever speak again?

In an agony of regret she remembered she had not listened willingly, had not welcomed the words spoken. The spirit, the divinity,

Prologue

the deity, whatever it was that had influenced her, filled her, had been repelled, and only tardily and unwillingly obeyed. Was it likely it would come to her side again?

But if it never came again, equally she could never forget. When one has once seen, or heard, or felt a thing, it is not necessary to one's own belief, is it, that one should understand and be able to explain its existence? That is only necessary to convince others. For oneself, one must know of that thing to the end of one's existence. Evelyn knew.

A friendly, protective influence, outside herself, outside apparently material laws, had manifested itself to her. That such existed, to her, was proved. She fell suddenly on her knees with a prayer of divine belief in her heart.

"O Voice! Voice! be with me always; protect me, stay with me."

This was the foundation and beginning of her religion.

THE RELIGION OF EVELYN HASTINGS.

CHAPTER I.

THE warm still air of an autumnal afternoon filled the long schoolroom of the First House at Trinity School, and the effect of the close, sultry atmosphere was reflected in the seventeen flushed, sleepy faces of the girls seated at the long table in the centre of the room. Their cheeks were coloured in uneven patches, their hair seemed dull and lifeless, their eyes looked swollen and heavy as they regarded each other listlessly across the once-polished surface of the bare table. Some of them seemed on the point of falling asleep, as the slow, droning voice of the professor at the

The Religion of

head of the table strove to impart to them the first principles of that most trying subject to the youthful feminine mind, Logic.

One of the girls formed a contrast to the others, as she sat at the head corner of the table, next in fact to the professor, though considerably below him in his elevated chair. Her face was pale, but it was neither swollen nor sleepy, and lighted by blue, sparkling eyes, which she turned constantly towards the large windows at her side and the green sloping lawns beyond. The correct oval of her face was not beautiful, nor even very pretty, but it had both good breeding and intellect stamped upon it, which are worth a great deal of beauty of form. The impression of distinction was still further confirmed by the unusually long throat, bound tightly round with a scarf of black lace, and the shape of the shoulders in the plain black serge of the school dress.

She looked longingly through the glass panes

Evelyn Hastings

at the green velvety sward, that stretched to where a noble fringe of poplars and quaking aspen grew and flourished on the bank of a narrow stream, gliding between the lawn and the meadow beyond; but though her eyes wandered more perhaps than those of the rest, her brain was apparently occupied with the matter in hand.

The professor for some time past had been receiving slower and slower responses to his questions from the befogged and sleepy class and his latest demand had been received with the final apathy of despair.

"I ask one of the young ladies," he repeated testily, "to give me an example of a perfectly true conclusion, being deduced in a legitimate manner from two entirely false premises."

"Shall I, professor?" asked the girl at the head corner, fixing two shining eyes upon him, which in her pale face gleamed as electric lights do in a white-papered room.

"Certainly, certainly," he answered, leaning

The Religion of

back in his chair and passing his handkerchief over his damp and reddened forehead.

"Well, then—first premise: Logic is an easy study; that's false. Second premise: I hate easy studies; that's false. Therefore I hate Logic; that's true!"

There was dead silence, and a little sleepy smile went round the tired faces of the girls, a look or two went across the table from one to the other which seemed to say, "So like Evelyn." But no one stirred nor tittered, nor even looked at the professor. He gave one piercing glance at his brightest but perhaps altogether not most satisfactory pupil and abruptly closed his books.

"Very good, arrived at in quite a legitimate manner; but I hope it does not represent your sentiments exactly."

"I only gave an example, professor," the girl murmured submissively, studying the longitudinal cracks that ran down the table.

"Quite so, quite so, and—er, as it's ten

Evelyn Hastings

minutes to four, I think I may adjourn the class."

Now, if there was one thing the professor was nervous about, it was getting down from his high chair and getting out of the room with the bright eyes of the young ladies upon him. For some inscrutable reason he never opened the door more than about eighteen inches, and as he was very broad and portly, he could only wriggle through a crack of that size with the utmost difficulty. On this particular afternoon he seemed more nervous than usual, and in executing his difficult exit he dropped first two of his books, and then as he stooped for them his case of spectacles bulged from his breast pocket and most unkindly jumped to the ground. A reassuring giggle came to his crimsoning ears from all parts of the room, but as he bent for the second time a slim, agile figure intervened, and it was his incorrigible pupil Evelyn who stooped with a grave face, picked up the spectacles and handed

The Religion of

them to him, and then kindly held open the door and gently shut it after him.

"Why did you bother to do all that for the old idiot?" yawned a big, heavy-looking girl, slapping her copy-books together. "Seeing him take half-an-hour to wriggle through that door is all the fun we have."

Evelyn did not answer. She had walked up the room, and now stood gazing out of the long window, across the well-kept lawn to the long line of poplars at the bottom, turning already a little yellow in the thick September heat. A bursting, splitting pain throbbed in her head. The air in the room seemed to press on her like a mattress. The shade of the trees invited her; she panted for a breath of clean, clear air. The girls were not allowed on the lawn nor in the gardens, these being strictly reserved as a vision of beauty to be shown to the girls' parents when they came down to visit the pupils. If a girl were found trespassing on the lawn, a page of Hume's English History, to be

Evelyn Hastings

learned and repeated by rote, was the penalty. To Evelyn, however, this punishment had no terror, and she had just decided that she would gain a breath of fresh air at all costs, and use up her valuable ten minutes of leisure on the forbidden lawn, when she heard a forlorn little voice at her elbow.

"Please do my *devoir* for me."

She looked round and saw a white-faced, undersized little girl beside her, holding up an old ink-stained exercise-book.

Evelyn's nervous and hysterical irritability was so great at the moment that she felt a furious impulse to dash the book out of the little creature's hand on to the ground, and she stood for a second quite silent, struggling with herself. Then she smiled and took the book.

"Well, but if I do your *devoir* every night for you, Amy, when and how are you going to learn French?" she asked gently.

"But I can't do it," whined the other,

The Religion of

forlornly. "I'm so hot and so tired, and it's too difficult," and she kneaded two little knuckles into her reddened eyes. Evelyn carried the book to the long table and sat down to write out the *devoir*. After the logic class, which terminated at four, the girls were left alone for an hour, but for the supervision of one of the under-governesses, to write out their French exercises, which they called *devoirs*, or more commonly "devs." At five came tea, and after that the terrible French class, when the "devs" were looked over and corrected, and the culprits—for as such the French mistress seemed to regard her pupils—who had written them, duly and fittingly punished. Evelyn, who could write her own *devoir* in ten minutes, was generally called upon by the rest of the class to write theirs as well during the remaining fifty, and books were surreptitiously passed and shuffled along the table to her, while the governess placidly read a novel at the head

Evelyn Hastings

of the table. Evelyn, who considered the French woman very unsympathetic and undiscriminating, could not bear to see the girls punished for leaving undone tasks that had been ill explained and badly taught to them in the first place, and often by quick writing, which she varied as much as possible for each "dev," contrived in the hour to do the work of the weaker half of the class. She would willingly have been spared the labour this particular evening, but the copy-books came eagerly shuffling along the table as usual, and when Amy's was done, she took another and another till there were only five minutes of the hour left. Then she commenced her own, but her fingers were cramped and hot, and her brain confused. She had only time to scribble down a few sentences when the tea-bell rang, and there was a general scraping and clattering as the girls pushed back their chairs. Evelyn closed her book and thrust it into her desk with a shrug of her shoulders

The Religion of

and went with the others, a tired, harried-looking troop, down the stairs towards the dining-room. She felt that desperate bursting pain within her soul that all young things feel when too closely confined, too rigidly and too long repressed.

"When will it come to an end?" she thought; "when? when? this horrid life, this having to act, to move according to order. This life in a crowd, in a mass, with no individuality and no change in it."

When the flock of girls had been driven down the stairway by the governess behind them, they had still a long way to go to reach the Fifth House, where the tea was served. Trinity College was formed of seven large houses, all communicating one with the other for the whole length of the ground they covered, by long stone underground passages, lighted here and there, as convenient, by small skylights. Dim, ghostly, and chill they looked in the evening dusk as the girls

Evelyn Hastings

straggled along them, and all the way along on either side opened little low wooden doors into caves of mysterious darkness. These were small underground stone cells, entirely devoid of carpet and all furniture except a music-stool and a piano. They were lighted in the day by a tiny grating close to the ceiling, and at night by a single gas-jet standing out from the wall. They were the practising-rooms, familiarly called "numbers," and each pupil who took up music at the school was ushered into one of them by a governess twice a day and locked in for one hour to practise. The walls were purposely constructed to prevent any noise escaping through them, lest the piano practice of one pupil should disturb that of another; so that any girl put into a number fully understood that she was utterly unable, whatever happened, to communicate with the outside world, and must trust wholly to the memory of the governess who put her in to come at the end

The Religion of

of the hour to let her out. These cells were the cause of much mental wear and tear to Evelyn, and she shivered as she passed them now, with all their little gaping mouths of darkness.

Tea over, the girls were marched back through the winding, intricate passages, now quite dark, and lighted occasionally by a gas-jet wherever there was a convenient elbow in the long walls of stone. Evelyn, whose feverish exhaustion had not been allayed by a cup of weak tea and two slices of thick bread and butter, took her place at the head corner of the table in the First House. Mademoiselle had already arrived, and was seated awaiting them, so there was no chance of finishing her French exercise, and she handed it up with the others as it was. What a malignant face the governess had, Evelyn thought, dreamily watching the small black eyes, with a cast in one of them, and the long upper lip of the thin, straight mouth. Wearily she listened as

Evelyn Hastings

the tall pile of "cahiers" was gone through, and the lower half of the class was praised in a half-grudging tone for her work. Then came her turn, and the governess, knowing Evelyn's proficiency in French, glared at the unfinished exercise, seeing a deliberate insult to herself in it.

"I had a headache," murmured Evelyn; "I will do two for you to-morrow."

"You will learn a page of French for me to-night," returned the governess in her flinty tones. Evelyn bowed her head. She cared very little; a page was soon learned, and to be retained in the empty, quiet schoolroom to learn it gave her that much shorter time in the crowded, noisy dormitory upstairs, which she hated. She went through the class-work in a tired, muddled way, and at half-past six the class was dismissed, the girls scrambling off without a look at their companion, whose charity to them had resulted so badly for herself. The governess saw them out of the

The Religion of

room, and then marked a page in a French History and handed it to Evelyn. She then got up and proceeded to turn out the lights and gather up her books, preparatory to leaving the room. Evelyn looked up inquiringly. "You will leave me one light?" she said. The woman turned, and Evelyn almost shrank from her face, such an animal ferocity gleamed in her squinting eyes.

"I shall not leave you here," she remarked. "I am going to put you in a number, *ma chère*."

Evelyn paled suddenly. She always disliked being locked in one of those narrow underground cells, even in the day-time and by a friendly governess who promised earnestly, in response to her entreaties, not to forget her. In the day-time one could not easily be forgotten for long. Now, at night, after the last roll-call, if Mademoiselle wished to forget her, it would be very easy to do so. She looked round; all the girls had gone some few minutes. They would be well on their way

Evelyn Hastings

to the Fifth House by now. There were no servants about, it was perfectly still; she and the woman were quite alone together in this distant First House. Thought is very quick, and Evelyn glanced at the figure before her, which seemed bristling with malignity, and hesitated as to whether she should refuse to go with her. But Evelyn came of an old Conservative family, and the blue blood that travelled along her veins was loaded with respect for established authority. Full of hatred and rebellion as she always was, against the school routine, she fulfilled it scrupulously; to revolt against it openly, while still dependent upon it, would be to her ideas under-bred and unworthy of her. She knew now her refusal to obey the governess would be the signal for a physical struggle. She measured in a flash the great square, angular heavy frame against her own. Tall and strong as she was herself, she doubted if she could gain a victory over *that*; and it

The Religion of

she did, what a public disgrace! If she succeeded in attracting any attention and summoning any help, what a scandal to be found struggling and fighting with your mistress, simply because she proposed the very ordinary and quite legitimate punishment of locking you into a number by yourself for an hour! Evelyn would have no proof that the woman had meant to forget her there; no one would believe such a tale, though Evelyn instinctively knew that that was her intention. Then of course the mistress would be upheld, and Evelyn would have to go. The only thing she would gain would be a witness of her imprisonment, and so a certain security; but was that worth the sacrifice of her dignity? She had lived all her life at the school, and the reports on her conduct sent home had always been immaculate records of propriety. Should this woman trap her into an undignified position? She thought not. Evelyn rose from the table with the pride of generations

Evelyn Hastings

stamped on the small pale face. She made no remark, and the woman turned out all the gas-jets. They were then in perfect darkness, and in a second Evelyn felt a grip on her arm and a wrench, as the woman pulled her out of the room and pushed her downstairs beside her. Evelyn felt the cold marbled paper of the wall at her side, and then the stone of the passages under her feet. They walked along in the dark, and made a quick turn and took two steps down into a lower passage. Evelyn knew the way, and her heart sank. The passage was damp and musty, and smelt of mould. None of the gas-jets were lighted, for there was little use of the passages or numbers at this hour, especially in the First House. They went on in the utter darkness, and then stopped suddenly before a number that Evelyn knew by its position was 18. This was one of the very old cells, and not generally used. The girls laughed about it and called it haunted. Evelyn cared very little about that. Had she

The Religion of

at any time met a ghost she would have been more pleased than not, shaken hands with it, and proceeded to "interview" it eagerly. But Number 18 in its horrible smallness and isolation was a terror to her. No one would think of looking for her here. The woman pushed open the door, and taking some matches from her pocket, struck one and lighted the gas-jet. It gave a dim light, the burner being half choked up with dust. She then locked the piano and put the key in her pocket, Evelyn watching her in silence. The woman's face was that of a fiend. Evelyn thought dimly of the Inquisition.

"Give me that book," she said sharply. Evelyn gave it. The woman tore out the page already marked and laid it on the piano. The book and the music-stool she threw outside the door, then she went out and banged the door to and locked it. She had great difficulty in making the rusty key turn in the keyhole, but it did so at last with a heavy grating sound.

Evelyn Hastings

When she had withdrawn it, Evelyn heard her say through the keyhole:

“Pour votre souper je vous conseil de manger les rats.”

For a few seconds the girl heard the sound of her mistress's feet retreating, then there was nothing more. There was silence, except a faint sizzling noise of the gas in its choked burner. Evelyn looked round. She had only room just to stand upright. The damp stone ceiling touched her hair. By stretching out her arms she could touch the walls all round. There was, in fact, just room for the small low piano and for one person to sit at it to practise—the use for which the cell was intended. There was a tiny grated window at one side of the ceiling. Evelyn sat down on the damp stone floor. Her heart beat quickly. The lowness of the ceiling, the damp, musty smell, the closeness of the walls all round her made her feel suffocated.

It was so horrid to be shut in, locked in, with

The Religion of

no possibility of escape whatever happened. Mademoiselle, too, meant to leave her there hours, she saw that in the woman's face. She meant to make her miss supper certainly, perhaps leave her all night! And nobody ever came past No. 18 or anywhere near it. Suppose there should be a fire in the school, who would remember a girl locked in a number? She would be roasted to death or suffocated, no one would come. The sweat broke out coldly all over her, the absolute horror that some people feel in being locked into a small space was upon her. She could do nothing. She could only pray. She buried her face in her hands and prayed in the direct and informal and childish fashion that was familiar to her. "Do please keep me safe here, and take me out safely, and don't make my hair turn grey in the night if I have to stay here and feel frightened." She prayed until she was tired, then she uncovered her face, sat up, and relapsed into speculation. "I advise you to eat the rats for

Evelyn Hastings

supper!" she repeated to herself. "I wonder what she meant? Some slang, I should think. What a fiend she is! I wonder what makes her such a fiend?" She poked her fingers absently into a mossy crack in the stone floor and thought it over. Mademoiselle had been at the school a long time, as long as Evelyn herself had. Evelyn was nineteen, and she had been sent to the school at nine. She remembered Mademoiselle ten years ago. She had not been so harsh and cruel then. She remembered a rather pleasant-faced woman with a soft skin. She had always squinted a little. Now her skin was like the leather of Evelyn's brown portmanteau; and she had been growing unkind and unkind. She never went away for the holidays, as nearly all the school did, except a few girls, of whom Evelyn herself was one, and the two "govs.," the German and the French. She must be getting very old now, Evelyn ruminated, she must be nearly forty, and she never saw any one

The Religion of

at all except governesses and girls; so she would never marry nor have any one to care for, she would live and live like this for ever, only governesses and girls. Perhaps she felt very unhappy, it was all so flat and stale and weary, life with no one to care about, never, never at all. Perhaps she felt as Evelyn herself did, and then there rushed suddenly into her mind the recollection of how she herself had turned on the child Amy and felt in her nervous hysteria she could strike her. And Evelyn had hope, her skin was still soft—she put up her hands to it; but Mademoiselle . . . and then there fell upon the reflecting girl on the stone floor one of those illuminating flashes of premature knowledge and understanding that are common to youth, and in which it receives its education, straight from the hands of its father, Experience! People talk of experience, and wonder sometimes how inexperienced youth can be so wise! Can experience teach as well as God? The blood rushed over her face, and

Evelyn Hastings

she rose suddenly to her feet in the excitement of her new-found knowledge.

"Poor, poor Mademoiselle!" she exclaimed aloud. "What a life she has had!" . . . Then with a shudder, "In twenty years more of this, perhaps I should be just like her." Filled with an immense pity, an immense humility, and an understanding of human life and the human mind more than all her nineteen years had given her, Evelyn sat down again and covered her face with her hands. She took her troubles up to God, as she did all of them as they came upon her, and prayed hard. "Oh! take me out of this horrible life, do please, soon. Take me away and put me into one where there is lots to do, lots to feel, even to suffer. Give me some one to care about, more, much more, than myself. Quick, do, O God! I'm nineteen! I've been here such an age. I'm getting so old. No one will care for me soon. God, be quick, do take me away. Give me some of the work of

The Religion of

the world." She threw herself forward with her white face pressed to the stones. She was so tired and burning and feverish, and one gets no rest sitting straight on a flat floor. She thought of the woman with pity. All that same longing to love and be loved that almost killed her under its weight, that savage cruel woman perhaps had known, and this turned back upon itself, pent up, repressed, in year after year of dreary suffering, had made her the fiend she was.

"And God," she added, "can't you do anything for Mademoiselle, to make her more happy?—do try!" She stopped, she was really so very tired. The girls all rose at 5 A.M., and the slight food and constant work of the day always made Evelyn tired in the evening. She closed her eyes and stretched herself out on the floor. "I might go to sleep," she thought drowsily; "please, God, stay with me, and take care of me." She lay quite silent for a few minutes and thoughts grew

Evelyn Hastings

dim. She would have fallen asleep then, but she suddenly felt something brush past her hand flung out on the floor. It startled her and she sat bolt upright. In the farthest corner of the cell she saw a furry object watching her with bright eager eyes. It was a rat. In a flash Evelyn remembered the woman's parting words. There were rats in this room then! That was why the girls called it haunted, that was what Mademoiselle had meant, and that was why she had put her here! Wide awake now, she stared at the creature in the corner. Evelyn was excessively fond of all animals, and regarded them all as her playfellows and friends. For the first moment, then, she felt nothing but delight that she was to have a companion through the night, and the rat looked so pretty and fluffy bunched against the wall that she thought she would like to take it up and cuddle it. She watched it for a few seconds because there seemed something sinister about

The Religion of

it and the way it watched her in return. Then, as she leaned forward a little towards it, it flew at her face suddenly like a dog and fastened its teeth in her chin. Evelyn sprang to her feet. She did not scream. It would have been useless, and it was not her instinct. She seized the rat's throat in her slim fingers and squeezed it tight. Its teeth relaxed, its mouth opened as it choked. Evelyn felt a warm trickle fall over her neck. It frightened her. She squeezed and twisted the rat's throat madly. Its beady eyes bulged forward, its legs and feet worked furiously, its tail lashed the air with great swishes. Then it was limp and hung in her hands suddenly. Evelyn, shuddering, threw it on the floor. It was the first animal she had ever killed, and she felt shocked and sorry as it lay soft and still upon the floor. "I couldn't help it," she reflected, drawing out her handkerchief and pressing it to her chin. She wondered with a thrill of horror if it would disfigure her,

Evelyn Hastings

and then laughed; a little bite from those pointed teeth, a small wound like that almost beneath her chin would never show. There was a slight rustle and swish behind the piano, and Evelyn saw a second rat squeeze itself out from between the piano and the wall; it was followed by another and another, and they pattered forward, moving their whiskers—snuffing eagerly. Evelyn paled and drew against the wall, setting her back against it, squarely. She looked round vainly but involuntarily. What a horrible position, alone here for hours to fight against them in the tiny space! She was weak and tired and empty from want of food; but she had that great force of nervous energy which is so powerful while it lasts, and which excitement always lends to natures like hers. “God, come to me, help me, keep me safe!” she entreated, and her absolute faith was as good, as wine and meat to her. “He will,” she thought confidently; “I’m sure He has not

The Religion of

designed me to be eaten by rats, nor to die in any way just now. He will hear me." She stood quite still; she felt excited but not afraid. Evelyn suffered much through her imagination, as sensitive imaginative people always do. She had none of the mere animal courage of those who fear nothing because they can realise nothing. Beforehand she realised too much and felt all her agonies and terror then; once in the midst of the much apprehended danger, her breeding came out and her blood showed in her courage;—courage indeed being the peculiar attribute of good blood, as the cock-fighters of Mexico well know, when all the betting is on the best bred bird. All the stories she had read of rats devouring prisoners alive in underground dungeons filled her brain, and the very latest occurred to her in every detail: a wretched man put into a police cell for drunkenness, had been found a little later, half fainting from loss of blood and struggling with the swarming

Evelyn Hastings

rats, who had all but conquered him. As her brain presented these pictures relentlessly one after another, she only set her teeth harder and thought, "He will protect me." The rats for the present took no notice of her. They snuffed all over their dead companion, and then tore him in pieces. Evelyn watched them with dilating eyes. "They are as hungry as I am," she thought. They tore and fought over the corpse, and devoured it bit by bit. In a few minutes there was nothing of the rat left but a few fluffs of grey fur, and the two flat shoulder-bones picked and licked perfectly clean. They had been very quiet over it; there was no sound except the sossing of their mouths as they ate and the sizzling of the gas.

Evelyn hoped they would be less hungry after their meal, and might possibly withdraw; but she soon saw that the taste of the blood and the flesh had made them more savage without satisfying them. Eating their com-

The Religion of

panion had also had a strange effect upon them. Long, long after, all her life in fact, Evelyn remembered the strange semi-human behaviour of those cannibal rats. They seemed savage, ferocious, excited, but yet strangely shy, one would almost say shamefaced, after their meal. They ran wildly hither and thither across the room in an irresponsible way, stopping for a moment here and there to lick their mouths and whiskers clean of the blood; then they would jump, all four paws off the ground at once, and come down with a great spat of their long, flat, hairless tails. And all the time they seemed to avoid looking at each other, professing to be engaged in snuffing the floor or the feet of the piano or a crack in the wall, and Evelyn could have sworn that where they stared fixedly at her before, they now seemed to avoid her eye, and squinted past her. After a time she noticed they were coming and keeping nearer to her. One rushed backwards and forwards before her feet for a number of

Evelyn Hastings

times, and then suddenly made a spring up the front of her dress and fixed its teeth in her arm. She dealt it a sharp blow on its head with her doubled fist, and it fell back stunned. Another, however, had immediately imitated it, and jumped high as her shoulder. The others followed; they were leaping up on her on all sides. Evelyn, trembling with terrified excitement, struck out at them with both hands, but as she beat them down and they fell on the floor, they sprang back at her with redoubled fury. She felt very weak, and her heart beat so violently that it almost stifled her. The air in the cell was such a small volume, and the smell of the rats was strong and sickening. If she should faint and fall among them, how horrible! "God, you won't let me do that!" she muttered. She did not believe she would. Her blood was up, and the fighting strength, which is very great in Nature, was hers for the time.

She saw she must, if possible, kill them as

The Religion of

they attacked her, not merely strike them back to the floor. She looked round the room *there was nothing, absolutely nothing.* The music-stool, that might have helped her as a weapon, was gone. Then her eyes grew wide with horror as they fixed on the gas-jet. The light in it was growing less; it was going down, they were turning it off in the school; they always did at ten. In a second she would be in total darkness. The light diminished rapidly, sank to a little blue flicker and was gone. The last thing Evelyn's terrified eyes caught in its dying gleam was a line of rats stealthily winding out from behind the piano; new-comers to reinforce their comrades. Evelyn gave a cry of agony. It was horrible to have to fight these swarming enemies in the thick, close, stinking darkness. Then she stooped suddenly and tore at the buttons of her boot. She had on a thick school pair with solid heels capped by a steel plate. A rush of triumph filled her; this would help her. As

Evelyn Hastings

she stooped forward she felt a rat jump on the back of her neck. With a sort of scream, she put up her hand and tore it off. The creature turned and bit through her finger, squeaking furiously. This and the darkness seemed to excite the rats. They rushed at her, she heard them clawing up her rough serge dress, she felt them reach her neck, they bit her on the bare flesh, and hung there wherever it was exposed. Mad with pain and terror, Evelyn let out at them furiously with the heavy steel-capped boot-heel, and where it struck full on an animal she heard it fall dully to the floor. If not always killed, it was helpless for the moment, and Evelyn heard the soss-sossing begin as the others attacked it, eat it, alive and quivering. All that long night through she stood with her back to the wall, striking in the darkness with all her strength and praying for deliverance and the morning. The night seemed to go on and on for ever. Once she stepped on a disabled rat, and as the pulpy,

The Religion of

slippery thing squealed under her foot, she sickened to faintness. But she kept her self-control, and at last, at last, the grey tinge of day crept through the iron grating and filled the cell. The rats, exhausted and satiated on their companions, slunk off behind the piano at the daylight, and Evelyn fell on her knees and thanked God in a passion of relief. She looked round. The floor was stained with blood and covered with bits of fur. Four or five dead rats lay there, mauled but not eaten. Then she looked at her hands and wrists; they were swollen and covered with blood. She felt her collar stiff with blood where the rats had bitten her neck. She was sore and sick and giddy, but nothing mattered, she had got through. She sat down and leaned against the wall under the grating utterly exhausted, nerveless, motionless. "I wonder when they will come and let me out," she thought dully, longing for air. But the daylight was a priceless boon after the darkness, and she felt almost content.

Evelyn Hastings

At six, as Evelyn had anticipated, when they had missed her at the roll-call, the head of the school, Madam, as she was always called by the girls, Mademoiselle, and two other governesses threw open the door of the number, and Evelyn saw their circle of white faces in the doorway. They drew back, almost overpowered by the smell. Evelyn was sitting still, against the wall, a blood-stained haggard figure, but with two cheerful, smiling blue eyes looking out at them. She got up slowly and stiffly, and went towards them, all her body trembling with fatigue.

"My dear, dear child!" stammered Madam, "how is all this? Were you here all night? What does it mean?"

"I expect Mademoiselle forgot me here," returned Evelyn, without glancing at that worthy woman, who stood shaking in the passage, squinting fearfully now in embarrassed terror.

Madam looked at the cell, at the absence

The Religion of

of mulic-stool, at the dead rats on the floor, at the blood, at Evelyn's figure, and said nothing. She was a kind, good woman, and a clever one. She was deeply distressed, and she feared for the prestige of the school. She took no notice of any one but Evelyn, whose arm she clasped, saying merely to one of the under-governesses:

"Send a maid to clean this room at once, then lock it and bring the key to me. And you, my dear," she continued to Evelyn, "you must come with me to my rooms and have breakfast with me."

Mademoiselle managed to sidle up on the other side of Evelyn in the dark passage and murmur in her ear:

"Je vous implore——"

Evelyn remembered her own prayers last night. "Je ne dirai rien," she replied in an undertone, and went on with the head-mistress, with weak and unsteady steps.

Now Madam and Madam's suite of rooms

Evelyn Hastings

over in the Seventh House were to the girls of the school as the Lama of Tibet and his sacred penetralia are to the world in general. Something very far off, wonderful, fearful, and fascinating. The school, with its eighty girls, besides the day-boarders, and its large staff of governesses, was quite a little kingdom over which she reigned, an awe-inspiring majesty. Therefore Evelyn, led along by Madam herself, and spoken to in familiar tones by Madam's voice, being only a schoolgirl—and perhaps not a wise one at that—felt, in spite of her sick faintness, quite pleased and elated. When they reached the sacred precincts of the Seventh House, she was shown into Madam's own bedroom, and felt that to have been there would crown her with distinction for the rest of her school career. She stared round wonderingly. Accustomed to the school dormitory, with its narrow white beds, its oilcloth-covered floor, its straight chairs and high,

The Religion of

bald, curtainless windows, this interior struck her with pleased astonishment. She walked over to the long cheval glass, tipped at an inviting angle. Her face looked dirty and tired, with a spot of black caked blood on the chin. Madam told her to come and wash at the marble stand, and Evelyn came, admiring the duck's-egg coloured china, and feeling her feet sink into the soft carpet. "Please let me have a bedroom of my own like this soon," she prayed inwardly, precisely as a confident child asks its indulgent father for any new toy that catches its fancy. After washing her face and smarting hands and arms, she let down her long light hair, and Madam came up to her and stroked it.

"What beautiful hair you have, my dear," she said, and brushed it with great silver-backed brushes, to Evelyn's inward glee. What tales she would tell the girls of Madam's room! Then when her arms were dusted over with powder, and she was look-

Evelyn Hastings

ing her own neat, delicate self again, they went into a cosy little sitting-room adjoining, where a fire sparkled in the grate and Madam's breakfast was waiting on the table. Hot coffee and silver urns, hot rolls and toast, and brown soles and eggs; all on a snowy-clothed table with red-brown chrysanthemums in the centre. How different from those long narrow tables with the piles of thick bread and butter and the weak, tepid tea! But Evelyn did not in the least resent the difference. She did not come from a Radical family, but one in which respect for established authority was inherent, and was not Madam madam, and the girls only girls?

Madam was charmed with her. She was so simple and bright in her manner, ~~and~~ seemed so pleased with everything, neither forward nor shy. They took their places, and for the first time in ten years Evelyn enjoyed her breakfast.

The Religion of

"What do you think, my dear," said Madam, as she poured out the coffee: "had Mademoiselle any intention of leaving you there?"

"I suppose she forgot me at the end of the hour," replied Evelyn slowly.

"Do you think she is cruel or unkind to the girls?" pursued Madam; "have you noticed anything of that sort?"

"I think she is hard, too hard," returned Evelyn. "I feel sorry for her. She is soured; that is how women get who lead a life of self-repression, with no love nor interest in it."

Madam looked up and stared. This judicial philosophy was not what would have been expected from Evelyn's youthful lips; but she had learned more than Madam knew of the rats in the dark. Still, Madam was no fool, in fact her position as head of a flourishing fashionable school of eighty boarders proved so much. They ate in silence for some minutes, Madam looking

Evelyn Hastings

sharply at her now and then. There was something in the pale, quiet face with its small proud mouth that made Madam feel she would hear very little against Mademoiselle if the latter were not there to defend herself. So she merely said, at last, "In the girls' interests I want to know, do you think I ought to dismiss Mademoiselle?"

Evelyn hesitated. "She is a good French governess," she said at last. "Tell her not to be too strict, that's all, and to explain more to the younger girls. And . . . and . . . visit the class yourself sometimes, I should. And Madam——"

Evelyn hesitated and flushed painfully. It was a wonderful and terrible thing to be talking like this to Madam, and actually advising her—the great Llama! But Madam only beamed upon her and waited. She felt a great respect for the slight, pale girl opposite her.

"Do away with the custom of locking girls

The Religion of

into the numbers for their practice. Put them on their honour not to leave the room till the governess comes for them. That would be so much better."

"All girls are not like you, my 'dear,'" returned Madam, smiling.

"But you can make the penalty for leaving the room as severe as you like," pursued Evelyn eagerly. "If they break their word, hardly any punishment would be too much—only do away with those dreadful keys. If you knew what the girls suffer locked in like that! One feels one can't get away whatever happens, and each time one dreads being forgotten. And . . . and, you see, last night I did not mind the rats so much, for I felt sure God was with me and would not let them eat me; but ~~sure~~ girls are not like that, and it might have driven them mad with terror."

Madam nodded, and wiped her spectacles thoughtfully. "It might indeed," she said. "It was a most terrible experience, and most

Evelyn Hastings

reprehensible in Mademoiselle to forget you. It has never happened before, never."

"No; but the girls suffer as much each time," returned Evelyn, anxious to enlist sympathy for imaginary troubles which to her were really as bad as, or worse than, actual ones. "Dear Madam, do please give up the keys and put the girls on their honour. I know it will be just as good."

Madam smiled indulgently. "Well, well," she said, "we must see. And now, Evelyn, if I should do as you wish, will you do me a personal favour in return?"

Evelyn stared now. Was the great Llama asking favours of her?

"Certainly, Madam," she returned.

"It is to say nothing at all of this business when you return home. It might do the school a great deal of harm,—which I am sure you would not wish," Madam added rather anxiously. "I believe you feel I am very sorry for such an unfortunate occurrence."

The Religion of

Evelyn looked rather bewildered. She certainly had no intention of talking about the matter. But why "when she went home"? When had she ever been home? Had she not often written and begged her mother to let her come home for the holidays, as other girls did, and had not she always been told in reply that holidays were unsettling and unnecessary?

"I shall say nothing, Madam, to any one," she answered simply.

"That is a dear child. I am sure, Evelyn, if all the girls here were like you, my life would be an easier one. Now I want to tell you," continued Madam, replacing her glasses and gazing straight at the girl through them, "I had a letter from your mother, dear Lady Hastings, who informs me that she is satisfied your education is now finished, and will be pleased to have you home at the end of this term." So your school-days are practically over, my dear, and I hope, with the exception of last

Evelyn Hastings

night's misfortune, they have not been very unhappy ones."

Evelyn sat opposite her quite silent. She was stunned, overwhelmed. Her school-days were over. This life, the only one practically she had ever known, cut away from under her feet! Her prayers of last night recurred to her. Had she not implored to be taken from it? Now at a touch, at a word, she felt it was dissipated. A month or two more and it would be left behind her; she would forget it and know it no more. The unknown stretched before her. Something, something that was not quite all lessons and cold and chilblains and hunger and governesses and girls was going to be given her. She sprang up suddenly and clasped her hands. "Oh, I am so glad!" she said devoutly and unthinkingly.

Madam looked pained.

"I am sorry to hear you say that, my dear, when you have been with me so long."

The Religion of

Evelyn knelt by the old lady's side, gentle and contrite.

"It is just that, Madam, only that I have been here so long, and I was so afraid I might grow like Mademoiselle." Then, as Madam glanced at her sharply and she was afraid she had betrayed her enemy, she added, "Hard, I mean—so hard and brown."

Madam looked a little bewildered, then she patted the soft, fair head at her knees.

"I see: you don't want to be an old maid. Well, I think there is no fear of that; but don't be in too great a hurry to marry, my dear. Your real troubles will only begin then."

"But I don't mind troubles in life," said Evelyn, earnestly; "only emptiness."

Madam sighed. "You haven't tried the troubles," she said.

"No; but I've tried the emptiness, Madam," Evelyn returned. "Nothing can be worse."

There was silence. Evelyn sat down on the floor by Madam's chair and gazed into the fire.

Evelyn Hastings

Going home, going away from school for always! and she had never been away, not even in the holidays. She had been longing so for deliverance, and it had come—it was here. How wonderful! She heard Madam's voice speaking.

"I think you ought to go and lie down. You had no sleep last night, and I am going to give you a holiday to-day. You shall lie down on my bed and get a good sleep now. I won't have you disturbed till you wake. Your arms and hands, my poor child, are in a terrible state."

"Are rat bites dangerous?" asked Evelyn dreamily. She was feeling very sleepy now, her lids felt heavy, and the prospect of sleeping on Madam's bed under that canopy of rose chintz and red velvet was alluring.

Madam, who in addition to her naturally kindly impulses, had the additional motive for keeping Evelyn from public view in her present state, took her back into the bedroom, and

Religion of Evelyn Hastings

wrapping her comfortably in a voluminous shawl, left her happy under the red canopy. But sleepy though she was, Evelyn did not fall asleep at once. She lay stretched out luxuriously on the big bed thinking.

"This room," she thought, "how I like it! How I should like one of my own just like this!" Then, as her eye wandered round and caught a photograph of Monsieur, Madam's husband, over the mantelpiece, and an old coat flung over a chair, the little portly figure it fitted rose before her, and she added involuntarily, "And some one more interesting to share it with than Monsieur."

CHAPTER II.

"HERE, get away, I want to look for a minute."

Evelyn drew back farther into the corner and let Maud Stevens take her place in front of her, which she did promptly, and put her eye to the little crack at the back of the velvet curtain, through which Evelyn had been so eagerly peering.

The three schoolrooms of the Fifth House, which all communicated by large folding-doors, had been thrown into one, and the two first had been filled with chairs and seats for the audience, while the third, screened off by heavy velvet curtains from ceiling to floor, had been reserved for the stage. It was the night of the school concert at the end of the term. Tomorrow was breaking-up day for the Christmas

The Religion of

holidays. To Evelyn it was much more: it was the closing of an era in her life. The definite turning over of the page at which the Book of Life for her had stood open so long—a dull, uninteresting page, Evelyn had always thought, and one which she had failed to appreciate, even such as it was, largely through a burning curiosity about the rest of the book on ahead. It is so always. We keep on fluttering over the leaves with restless fingers, rarely getting the best in the page that is before us, in our hurry to find something better in the next; forgetting we can never turn back the leaves of that mysterious book, and when we come to the last page we are sorry, very sorry. But Evelyn was too young yet to have come to the regretting. She was filled to overflowing with the joy of the next page.

She was very prettily dressed for the concert, in a white lace dress that fell to her white-stockinged ankles and showed the little neatly-shod feet. A scarlet silk zouavé sat well on

Evelyn Hastings

her shoulders, and her light curling hair fell in a loose twist to her waist over it.

"How the room is filling up," remarked Maud in a whisper; "and did you notice that man in front with the old lady, isn't he just too handsome for anything?"

Her eye was at the crack, but her rather thin, flexible red ear stretched itself to catch Evelyn's views. But Evelyn had found another crack, and was looking too. The room was nearly full of the parents, sisters, brothers, and aunts of the girls of the school, feminine relations predominating. In the front row of all sat an old lady in very voluminous black silk and an enormous hat that blocked the view of the stage completely for the three chairs behind her. By her side, evidently her escort on the occasion, sat a young man, at whose face Evelyn gazed curiously. She was curious and interested in everything new that came under her notice, and she had never seen a man like this before. Men were

The Religion of

an unknown quantity to Evelyn. They had formed no part of her life. It was true she was familiar with a few types: the bald-headed professors, very fat and dignified, who lectured on history and philosophy; the short, red-haired Germans, who gave music lessons; the long, thin Italian, who read Dante to them; and round, affable little Monsieur, the head of the school, with the pointed French beard. But this man was quite different, and Evelyn, extravagantly fond of beauty in anything, gazed and gazed at the face so unconscious of her eyes with delighted abstraction. It was an oval face, perfectly modelled from forehead to chin, but perhaps the greatest beauty lay in the singularly high-sweeping arch of the eyebrows over the bright hazel eyes; the hair was black and as curly as it could be, in spite of being cut exceedingly close to the head. And in place of the impassive stupidity common to most well-carved features, the face had a wonderful brilliance

Evelyn Hastings

and vivacity. The girl watched him, fascinated as he laughed and talked with his companion, his short, even white teeth showing in glimpses and the colour changing under the clear transparent brown of the skin. He appeared kind and charming, unaffected and clever, and Evelyn seemed to feel something in her life would be accomplished when a man like that should smile and talk to her. "Beauty is so much," she thought, "It is a pity I have not more," came next as a sad reflection, then more cheerfully, "but I have more than that old lady, anyway, and he is very nice to her."

A gong sounded sharply, and Maud started.

"There, Evelyn, we've got to go: they're going to pull back the curtains."

Evelyn did not move, and Maud pulled at her sleeve.

"Evelyn, you'll be seen. We must get back," she entreated, as the curtain gave a preliminary twitch.

The Religion of

Evelyn turned, with her eyes suffused and misty, and Maud took her arm and trotted her along with her down a wooden step or two into an improvised dressing-room.

"I should like to marry a man like that, wouldn't you?" Maud said with a giggle, pulling her silk blouse down under her belt with a critical look in the glass.

Evelyn said nothing.

"He looks so awfully kind and nice, doesn't he, besides so awfully handsome? Now, Evelyn, you are always saying so much about prayer, why don't you pray you'll marry a man like that? and then of course you would do so."

"Perhaps I shall," returned Evelyn dryly.

Miss Stevens studied herself in the glass.

"It doesn't seem a very nice thing," she remarked in a prudish tone after a minute, "to fall in love with a man you have never spoken to, and then pray that you'll marry him."

Evelyn Hastings

Evelyn stopped her ears with an impatient movement.

"Oh! go away, Maud, if you are going to be so silly and disagreeable. You annoy me so much that I shall forget some of my lines."

Maud was silent while she dabbed a little more powder on her face. In her heart, that Evelyn should forget her lines was exactly what she wished, but Evelyn had no intention of gratifying her. Evelyn walked away to the corner of the room where a Union Jack was furled round a large pole, higher than her head. She unfurled it, looking at the folds affectionately as she shook it out. She was going to recite Kipling's poem, "The English Flag," and out of her own pocket-money had supplied a gorgeous silk flag for the purpose. She stood under it now with pride, the magnificent lines of the poem vibrating in her brain. There was very little danger of her forgetting them. They had become, since she had first selected her recitation, an integral

The Religion of

part of herself; and she felt at that particular moment, if it were required of her, she would lay down her life for the delicate silken folds with the lines and cross lines on them which stand for so much.

"There's my call, I'm going," said Maud suddenly. "Evelyn, just see if my dress hangs all right at the back."

Evelyn assured her that it did, and she fluttered away beaming. Presently there came some great crashing chords on the piano, and Evelyn knew that Maud was well on her way with her "Concert-stück." She listened mechanically. There was one passage Maud was never sure of, and when it came, Evelyn heard the nervous hesitation in the player's fingers. She willed with all her force that her friend would get through it. For an instant there seemed a stop, then the music went on triumphantly, and Maud, who could really play well, closed brilliantly.

When Evelyn came on the stage, with the

Evelyn Hastings

English Flag, everybody applauded—that was for the Flag, of course; but when she had finished, they applauded again. Evelyn's voice was very clear, and she felt her lines so deeply that she filled them with her emotion, but what really won the heart of the audience was the way she looked at the flag. Evelyn had the art of throwing herself with complete abandonment into anything she was doing at the moment. She was not particularly constant—such natures rarely are, and was quite capable of forgetting an emotion very soon after it was past; but at the time, it held her completely, entered into her and fusing with her soul, simply transformed her into a perfect exponent of itself. Now, with her ardent voice and eyes, she seemed patriotism embodied.

The young man in the front row kept his eyes on Evelyn, from the first line to the last, and clapped more vigorously than any one at the conclusion. Evelyn had a faint knowledge that the old lady beside him was beaming and

The Religion of

smiling upon her, and when she came down the little steps at the side she seemed walking on air, and saw nothing before her eyes except an oval face, full of strength and life and colour, stamped with approval of herself.

It had been a most interesting concert this time, she thought, and generally the school concerts were so dull. After the parents and friends had left, there was a supper and dance for the girls amongst themselves. Maud and Evelyn were partners, and Maud took the opportunity of saying, "You didn't say your piece half so well as when you were rehearsing, Evelyn."

"No, I don't think I did."

"And how that man with the ridiculous old lady looked at you," pursued Maud after a minute. "I believe he must be some relation."

"I don't know," responded Evelyn.

"I almost broke down in my piece," Maud said, abruptly changing the conversation.

"That hateful bar with the shake always

Evelyn Happings

muddles me. I quite forgot for a minute what came next, and then suddenly my fingers went on of themselves; wasn't it lucky?"

"Yes, I heard you in the dressing-room. I was awfully afraid you were going to stop, and I willed all I could for you to get through."

"That's curious," exclaimed Maud, staring at her. "Do you believe in that sort of thing?"

"Oh, I don't know," answered Evelyn, carelessly. "There are such lots of things in this life we don't understand. It's always worth trying. Sometimes it seems to work, and sometimes it doesn't."

"Like prayer."

"No," answered Evelyn quietly. "Prayer always works sooner or later."

CHAPTER III.

FOR the first few days after Evelyn came home life seemed an inexpressibly dull and heavy thing. It seemed to her like some great grey voluminous blanket that she was muffled up in. She crept up and down the wide, shallow stair-cases of the great house perpetually filled with foggy vapours, and round the large drawing-room that never seemed to be in anything but twilight, in a desolation born of having nothing to do. The school life had been monotonous certainly, but it had been filled with hard mental work, which is life-sustaining. Her mind had been constantly braced by it, and towards the end over-excited and stimulated by the final examinations; now it was suddenly starved, and she felt as miserable as perhaps a delicate musical instrument does when all its

Religion of Evelyn Hastings

strings are suddenly let down. The modern education of youth is a curious and wonderful thing. It consists of periods of mental excessive feeding and intoxication called study, interspersed with sudden intervals of starvation called rest. The mental digestion and functions are, after all, very similar to the physical ones; and what would one think of a physician who fed his patients violently and plied them with stimulating drinks for three months, and then for the succeeding two or three weeks gave them nothing but a few crumbs of dry bread and cold water?

Poor Evelyn, the victim of this evil system, wandered about the house feeling strangely weak and listless, received the congratulations of callers on having left school finally and being at home, and replied dutifully she was enjoying it immensely.

After those few days, however, a very ordinary little incident occurred, following which home life became distinctly more endurable. Lady

The Religion of

Hastings gave a tea, quite a *chef d'œuvre* in its way—the prettiest tea of the early winter. Tiny square tables, almost hidden under their decorations of pink and white flowers, were dotted about the room, and each was presided over by a young girl,—destined to supply that form of stimulant to a limited number of guests. Evelyn, whose table was in the centre, and covered with only white flowers, sat pouring tea as she had been directed, in her usual rather languid fashion. She was arrayed in a very elaborate costume of black and white, and her hair had been fashionably tortured with waving and curling irons till her head looked like a sketch in a hairdresser's advertisement, and altogether she was so satisfactory that Lady Hastings gazed on her from afar with contentment.

Just as she was pouring her sixth cup of tea, there was a little flutter at the door, and Evelyn raising her tired eyes, saw a voluminous old lady with a marvellously youthful hat

Evelyn Hastings

coming in. It was not at the old lady, however, nor even at her hat that Evelyn was looking, but at the man, who accompanied her, and whom Evelyn recognised instantly as the one who had sat in the front seat and applauded so heartily at the school concert. She coloured a little and felt nervous as the old lady made straight for her table and charged up the centre of the room to the imminent danger of all the light furniture, while her escort pressed on close in the rear.

"Ah, Evelyn dear," she said, "glad to see you looking so well. My nephew, Captain Durham, wants to be introduced to you. So much struck, you know, by your recitation the other day—what was it, the 'Navy's Flag'?—no, the 'Nation's Flag'—no, the 'English Flag'—that was it. Dear me, a very pretty and appropriate little piece."

Evelyn and Durham had clasped hands and were looking at each other. They did not interchange any of the usual introductory

The Religion of

formalities; that did not seem necessary. They felt as if they had known each other already. Perhaps seeing each other at the concert had brought this about.

"I miss my little school-girl," he said gently in a low tone, when he was seated beside her, glancing over her now highly-finished head and figure, and amazed at the increased height her long gown gave her.

"Yes, the school-days are all over now," she answered, with a little quickly suppressed sigh.

"And how do you like society?" he asked, smiling.

"Oh, not at all," she answered quickly. "It seems to me so depressing. It's like the London fog. I was introduced to both at the same time, and I know I shall always associate them together."

Durham laughed outright.

"You are severe," he said.

"I like doing things and feeling things, and in society no one does or feels anything. They

Evelyn Hastings

idle away their time and say things—mostly disagreeable ones.”

“That’s quite true; but then a society life is for idle people. It is not for clever, energetic ones,” he added, looking at her thoughtfully; “it suffocates them.”

“Like the fog,” murmured Evelyn, absently.

“But intense feeling is a great strain?” suggested Durham.

“Not so great to me as idleness,” returned Evelyn, with a smile.

Durham thought favourably of the character she showed in the remark, and more so of the bright white teeth that she showed in the smile.

“You were feeling deeply when you gave us ‘The English Flag.’”

Evelyn’s eyes flashed suddenly, for a moment her whole face lighted up.

“I love the flag!” she said with passionate emotion. The next moment she coloured and looked embarrassed. Since her entry into

The Religion of

society she had learned that to show any interest or emotion, to express any opinion or sentiment with energy, was as foolish and babyish as it was ill-bred, and she was trying hard to fall into the social drill.

Durham felt a quick beat of his heart respond to her words and look, and he gave utterance to a sentence that would never have been heard from his lips by his worldly friends.

"I love it too," he said simply, in a low tone.

These eight words were like links of a chain thrown out, and drawing one to the other. In the few seconds' silence that followed, the thought passed through him what a wife for a soldier she would make; and she felt indefinitely that since to her, being a woman, it was forbidden to fight and die for the flag, the next best thing in life would be devotion to one who could.

Both thoughts were entirely abstract ones. The surest sign of a great and worthy character

Evelyn Hastings

is its constant tendency towards the abstract. Little, mean minds never concern themselves with it. It is a large thing, and they literally have not room for it. All impersonal emotions, being large and rich, take lodgings in big minds, as invariably as fat Americans go to big hotels. And in the impersonal direction which their thoughts took as a matter of course, Evelyn and Durham proved that their minds were about of one size. A very comfortable foundation for friendship or any form of companionship. When a man and woman appear together and they are of large and nearly equal stature, it is common for society to say approvingly, "They make a splendid pair." The splendidness of the pairing would be more assured if the same conditions applied to their minds. But, of course, of such little trifles as minds, society cannot be expected to take account.

Evelyn and Durham felt extremely happy now, like two conspirators who have suddenly

The Religion of

discovered each other in a crowd. Conspirators they practically were, with their earnestness and genuineness against the reigning superficiality and pretence all round them.

Durham had drawn up a low gilt chair, on to which with some difficulty he folded his long, slim figure, and accepted cup after cup of tea with unblushing persistence, as an excuse for staying so long beside the table with the white flowers.

Evelyn, smiling, animated, and happy because for the first time she could express herself without reserve and feel she was understood, and beautiful because she was interested and absolutely natural, talked to him as exclusively as she could without neglecting her office as hostess, and felt dreadfully sorry when Durham at last rose and took his leave.

"May I take one of these to commemorate the most charming hour of my life so far?" he said, touching a little white rosebud in the vase close by her: and reading her consent in a flush

Evelyn Hastings

and a smile, he secreted it and withdrew, just as Lady Hastings bore down upon them from the other end of the room. Evelyn felt vaguely she was not particularly pleased with her, and she saw she had guessed rightly when her mother came into her room a little later, just as Evelyn had finished dressing for dinner. Lady Hastings sat down on the opposite side of the fire to her daughter, and gazed at her with knitted brows.

"I don't understand you," she said. "This afternoon, when you were talking to Captain Durham, you looked pleased, healthy, merry, just as I should wish, and as you've never once looked when I specially wanted you to. Why was it?"

"Well, I think," returned Evelyn, slowly searching, as was her foolish and unnecessary way, for the real truth before answering, "it was because I was interested in what we were saying."

Lady Hastings knitted her brows.

The Religion of

"Interested in what you were saying?" she repeated, puzzled. "That seems rather silly. He is only a captain. Can't you be more interested in the person you are talking to? Not in them—their selves, of course, I don't mean—but according to their position. I saw Lord Strathmore talking to you last night, and you seemed quite dull. Now, Lord Strathmore is much more important to please than a man like Captain Durham, don't you see? You should consider these things. When any man is introduced to you, you should run over in your mind what you know of him—his position, title, income, and so on. Then, if it's all satisfactory, give him as much time as you like, put on all that pretty animation you had this afternoon by all means; if the man's of no use, a nobody, be civil of course, but don't waste your time on him. You must get into this habit; it's the very basis of a success."

Evelyn was staring into the fire, and her face was thus naturally a little averted from her

Evelyn Hastings

mother. On it a red flush of shame was gathering, which deepened every moment. In a vague and general way she knew of a terrible thing that was represented by the word "prostitution," and to her infinite horror and amazement it seemed to her now in a sudden flash that her mother was summing it up and offering it to her.

To Evelyn's character—open, candid, abhorring any shadow of pretence, excessively proud and conscious of the dignity of self, above all without a tinge of worldliness or scheming ambition—such a speech seemed simply terrible.

"Of what are you thinking, Evelyn?" asked Lady Hastings impatiently.

"That I should like to go back to school or into a convent, I think," she answered, with whitening lips.

"A convent!" exclaimed Lady Hastings, turning pale at the mere word. "Why, Evelyn, you are made for Society, simply made

The Religion of

for it. Almost any gown looks well on your figure, and you have a complexion that goes with any colour; you can wear any shade. All you want is a little more experience, a little more *finesse*. You will soon get that."

"I don't think so. I am not a bit fitted for this life. I couldn't possibly do all you've just been suggesting. I don't care a bit what people's position is; I never know and I never can remember it. I think of what they are mentally, and if I'm pleased I show it; if not, why should I pretend it?"

She spoke so passionately and looked so white and excited, so different from the pleased, smiling girl of a few moments before, that Lady Hastings, who was by no means a fool in her own profession, thought it unwise to press the matter, especially as there were only a few minutes before dinner, and Lord Strathmore was amongst the guests for the evening. She changed her course instantly with the utmost tact. "Well, dear, there is no need to feel

Evelyn Hastings

distressed; of course you are not used to Society. But Lord Strathmore is coming, you know, to-night: be nice to him—I won't say for his position, but just because I ask you to."

Evelyn sprang up and kissed her mother on the forehead with her customary hot impulse, that always so alarmed Lady Hastings. "Oh, of course, mamma, I will! Anything you wish."

Lady Hastings patted her hand gently, and they went down together the best of friends. Evelyn kept her word and was "nice" to Lord Strathmore, to the permanent undoing of that nobleman's peace of mind.

On Sunday, Lady Hastings and her daughter went to church in the morning, and heard a sermon on "Unworldliness," which Lady Hastings commended very much to Evelyn as they drove home together.

"He was quite right when he said we were all too worldly," she said, leaning back against the cushions and feeling very hastened and

The Religion of

righteous, as indeed she made a point of feeling on Sundays. Her costume for church, one might say, consisted of a silk skirt, a velvet jacket, and a tippet of Piety, which were all put on and taken off before and after the services, respectively.

“‘We should think more of people with regard to their moral essentialness’—that was what I think he said—‘not so much with reference to the accident of circumstance.’”

Evelyn was silent. “I always do,” was the reply that rose to her lips but did not pass them.

When they reached home, they were told that Lord Strathmore was waiting for them in the drawing-room, and as Lady Hastings, who had been complaining all the morning of the chilliness of the church, suddenly discovered now that the heat of it had given her a headache, Evelyn went in alone and Lady Hastings retired to lie down a little before luncheon.

Evelyn Hastings

Evelyn walked into the room drawing off slender gloves from slender hands. A tall, broad man was walking slowly up and down, and approached her eagerly as she entered.

"You must forgive me for coming in the morning," he said. "I did so want to see you for a moment alone, and if I come any other time I never can."

"You need not apologise," returned Evelyn, gently.

"Evelyn dear, will you marry me?" he said next with remarkable abruptness. He had a very simple, straightforward nature—the kind which is particularly uninteresting to women. Nature has armed them with a watchful, instinctive knowledge that complexity of character is the one great antidote to satiety in love.

Evelyn looked at him and read in his kind and commonplace face his kind and commonplace nature.

He saw she was considering and calculating

The Religion of

something, and thought it was probably his acres and his country houses. As he knew these were all right, he felt confident.

Evelyn walked to the window, twisting her gloves.

"I am very sorry," she said gently, "I can't."

He had followed her.

"Why?" he said.

"Because I don't care for you," she answered, in a low, soft voice.

His eyes wandered all over her face with a yearning look.

"And you are going to marry only for that?" he asked. Ah, how invaluable this fresh, innocent, unworldly love would be!

"Yes," she answered.

"You care for some one else?" he suggested, with a bitter feeling of envy and impotence. He felt like a commoner. For the first time he experienced the disagreeableness of not being able to buy something he wanted—for the

Evelyn Hastings

first time in his life of riches he had found something too dear for him. He felt that all his revenues and rents and accumulated wealth were powerless to purchase what this simple girl held in her hands, and what she would bestow one day as a free gift, something for which there was no purchase at all.

Evelyn coloured a little. She could not be said to care for any one else, since as yet no other man had proposed to her; and she was of the type that never loves first. She was responsive, not initiative.

"Not for any one else individually," she answered. "But there is another class of persons for whom I feel I might."

Strathmore felt she was saying something exceedingly uncomplimentary, but he understood it too little to resent. After a minute of bewilderment, he muttered vaguely—

"Oh, I thought my class was all right."

This was his first proposal, and somehow it was not progressing exactly as he had always

The Religion of

been led to expect it would. He had always been told no girl in town would refuse him, and now one *was* refusing him—that was what he could not understand. “Is there no chance at all for me?” he asked.

“One whatever,” came her voice from the window. When she looked round the room it was empty. He had gone.

Evelyn went up to her room, changed her things, and came down to the dining room.

The luncheon was very silent. Evelyn was *distracted* and absorbed, oppressed by the necessity of telling her mother what had occurred, and Lady Hastings discreetly asked no questions and did not force the conversation.

Finally, when they were alone and the dessert before them, Evelyn ~~forced~~ herself to speak. She looked down at her plate and turned a morsel of peach over and over on it with her fruit knife.

“Strathmore proposed this morning, mamma,

Evelyn Hastings

and I refused him. Please don't be sorry about it. I could not help it."

Lady Hastings was a little startled, but not by any means dismayed. A refusal, after all, would not do more than make Lord Strathmore more eager. In her heart she felt a throb of respect for her daughter: idiotic as she truly appeared at times, she must yet know how to play her Society cards after a fashion, to have secured the most coveted proposal in London barely a month after leaving school; as she sat there she was a potential peeress. Thus in her thoughts; aloud, she only said, with affected resignation:

"Evelyn, you will be an old maid."

Evelyn smiled the supercilious smile of nineteen when thus threatened.

"Or marry some wretched captain," Lady Hastings added more tartly, nettled by her smile.

"There might be worse fates than that," replied her daughter dryly.

The Religion of

Lady Hastings did not deign to continue the skirmish. She rose abruptly.

"I have a headache, which your conversation does not improve. I shall go to my room again for this afternoon," and she left the room — her daughter standing looking through the window with her usual *désœuvré* air.

Evelyn went into the drawing-room. It seemed huge, and both ends were vague and uncertain in misty space. Beyond the windows was yellow, impenetrable fog, pressing up even to the panes. She wandered disconsolately about, threading her way amongst the delicate and pretty furniture, and finally seating herself beside the grand piano, she played a few of her pieces badly and without interest. Then she rose, and after more wandering in the room, settled down close by the fire, which she stirred into a red and cheerful blaze. It framed prettily her distinguished figure and handsome dress; and as Evelyn's eyes fell upon the latter, she felt sorry no one had called to

Evelyn Hastings

see it. No one? Evidently Lord Strathmore did not count, nor the congregation at church. But not even to herself did Evelyn admit who did count.

At four it was quite dark outside, and the cold, damp air penetrated even into the room. Evelyn, who had been feeling steadily duller and duller for the last few hours, rang for tea. A few seconds after the door was opened, and she looked up. It was not, however, the tea that was ushered in, but Durham.

He had been walking in the raw air and his nose was red, but Evelyn did not notice it. She sprang up as he entered, with a little cry of most unfashionable pleasure. This she recognised immediately, and became like a statue on the hearthrug as he approached, and extended her hand almost unwillingly. The cry, however, had told its story, and Durham's heart beat rapidly.

With remarkable unanimity they began to talk with sudden and violent interest about

The Religion of

the most casual things; added to that, both talked very fast without paying any attention to what the other was saying, and it is not surprising that they found the entry of the footman with the tea a decided relief. Durham leaned back in his chair breathless, and Evelyn displayed an unusual interest in the way the cups were arranged on the table.

"Thank you, that will do; you need not wait," she said, and turned her attention to making the tea. It was odd that the silence between them and in the room seemed so oppressive. To Evelyn there seemed a great pause, like that in a forest before a storm. She seemed in a great gulf of waiting that swallowed her up. What was it? She tried to shake off the curious feeling that possessed her under Durham's eyes. She tried to be natural—that is, to regain her artificiality and take up her talk again; but Nature held her tight. Nature was about to weld these two destinies into one, and she did not choose to be inter-

Evelyn Hastings

rupted. She forced Evelyn to raise her eyes at length and meet Durham's burning ones.

"Will . . . will you . . . ?" she faltered, holding out the cup of tea she had made with such elaborate pains; but her hand trembled, and the cup descended to the table again. Durham never had that tea. Nature was occupied with other and greater matters. Evelyn was conscious that Durham was standing up close beside her; she heard the words:

"Dearest, my life!" and knew that he was clasping her to him, knew also that she did not seek to resist. She was conscious of no great desire to yield. Simply, she had the overpowering conviction that she was in the presence of some force, before which she was as nothing—that wrapped her in itself and bore her with it, as a deep running rapid bears a feather along on its crest.

There was a small and quiet dinner-party that night, and Lady Hastings was simply

The Religion of

astonished at her daughter's brilliance. Gay and sparkling, her eyes full of light and her voice full of laughter, she riveted the attention of every one. When the guests had gone, Lady Hastings came up and kissed her, she was so pleased with the last old lady's remark as she left them.

"My dear, your daughter will end by being a beauty."

"Yes, mamma, I am so happy," Evelyn replied, returning the kiss. "I have accepted him."

"Whom, dear child? what do you mean?"

"Captain Durham."

Lady Hastings stared at her.

"But you refused Lord Strathmore?" she said, after a minute.

"That a girl might not wish to marry at all, she could to a certain extent understand. Many girls when they first came out had silly fancies, and many were too vain to accept their early offers; but that any girl should deliberately

Evelyn Hastings

refuse a good *parti* and accept a bad one on the same day seemed literally imbecile.

"Granted you care to marry, why not have taken Strathmore?" she continued, bewildered. "You might as well, if you wanted a gown choose a serge instead of a silk."

"I should, if the serge suited me better," Evelyn said very gently; "especially if it were silk lined," and she went to her own room, leaving her mother to worry out the hyperbole.

"Silk lined!" repeated Lady Hastings to herself. "I suppose she refers to his character and mind, and all that rubbish. All I know is, she won't get many gowns silk lined out of a captain's pay."

Upstairs, Evelyn on her knees by her bed was thanking her Friend in a passion of ecstasy for the great happiness the way had brought her—the love of a man she could love.

CHAPTER IV.

LADY LISTINGS was a philosopher in her way, and seeing it to be useless to oppose Evelyn's engagement to Durham, she tried to view it in the most satisfactory light. With this war going on, Durham must inevitably be called away in a few weeks, and thus the marriage might never take place; or, if it did, seeing the daily casualty lists, it was most likely her daughter would soon be left a widow. Her marriage would very likely cure her of her ridiculous ideas and fancies, and having once married for love, the second time she might very well marry sensibly. Evelyn was very young, she was attractive, but it was not altogether unsatisfactory that she should marry immediately, barely a month after leaving school, a man of good family if not

Religion of Evelyn Hastings

exactly a good match. Girls did hang on one's hands so now, and of course Lord Strathmore's proposal would become known. Altogether, things might have been worse, and Lady Hastings tried to accept the position with her usual amiability.

Durham and Evelyn saw each other every day with her permission. Still, even she, cold-blooded as she was, recoiled a little from the paper one morning not a week after "proposal Sunday," as Evelyn had jestingly called it, and the black letters danced a little before her eyes as she read: "The — Regiment has been ordered to proceed to the front without delay." She folded the paper together quickly, and kept it under her hand as she looked across the table to her daughter pouring out the coffee.

"Evelyn," she said tenderly. The girl looked up quickly. She knew her mother never spoke in that tone (except when something particularly disagreeable was coming.

The Religion of

"Durham's regiment," continued Lady Hastings, "has been ordered to the front. It is in this paper."

Evelyn put her hand over her eyes and leaned her elbow on the table. She said nothing. In a few moments she looked up, pale but calm. "It is what we expected, mamma," was all she said. Then, with a sudden flush sweeping over her face and a flash in her eyes, she added with superb confidence, "He will come back."

She ate her breakfast, however, with difficulty; then escaped from the table and her mother's slightly supercilious gaze as soon as possible, and went and buried herself in one of the ample sofas of the drawing-room. She expected Durham to come, and she sat listening to the dull, subdued roar of the traffic without in the fog-darkened streets, twisting the silken tassels round and round in her feverish fingers, almost pulling them off the fat, apoplectic-looking cushions. She had only a few minutes to wait, though it seemed as if

Evelyn Hastings

hours, heavy, grey, soft-footed hours, passed over her head, and then Durham came in. She sprang from her place and ran to him, and he felt indefinably that she knew what he had come to tell her.

She took his hand and pressed it, and there was a convulsive wring of agony in the slight white fingers, a suffering in the depths of the eyes she raised to his, eyes which had kindled into such wonderful life and passion since he had kissed her, that appealed to him. He drew her suddenly to him, and held her in a long, desperate embrace full of delight and pain, in the grey, quiet room, and their two hearts beat together and called to each other silently.

"I came to ask you something," he muttered at last, his face grey in the greyer air, "but it seems so cruel, so selfish, I can't."

She looked at him.

"It isn't," she said, with a slow little smile.

"Then will you?"

"Yes."

The Religion of

"To-morrow?"

"If you wish it."

He bent his head and kissed her with the terrible passion of the kiss before death.

"It seems so cruel to make you a wife for five days, and then——"

"And then we separate, you to fight for the Flag, I to pray for it—and you. Then you come back to me—I know you will, I know it!"

Her hands were clasped round his neck and he felt them burn—her eyes fixed on his seemed to compel him. They were filled with the light of an immense faith and confidence. Her whole body in his arms seemed expanding with a sort of triumphant joy that magnetised himself. What was it? He looked at her, surprised, and strained her closer to him, seeking to divine the strange power she seemed to possess. He felt strengthened, braced by it, like a man drinking in the salt air of the sea, or the breath of the pine woods. There were no tears here, no dejection, no despair; and it was the real,

Evelyn Hastings

sentient woman he clasped; he felt she showed herself without disguise to him. It was the Evelyn who went into the world quiet, cold, reserved that was the affected one; this passionate, trembling being, all enthusiasm, love, and courage, was her real self.

She let him fold her closer in his arms, and kissed him on the mouth as she had never done yet—ardently, with all the strength and fire of her nature, as if she wished to inspire him, to breathe into him some of her own faith and confidence. It impassioned Durham as no kiss had ever done. He felt for the moment as if some goddess full of divine fire had stooped suddenly and kissed him, poor mortal, and as the electric exaltation from her lips rushed through him, it seemed that the kiss was a talisman—that, goddess-like, she had conferred immortality on him by it, and raised him above earth's decrees. She looked at him smiling, saw the effect upon him, and had the first taste of that power that nature has lent

The Religion of

to all women, and that so few know how to use. He had come to her dejected, cast down, dreading to give the pain he must, fearing her suffering, hating his duty, unnerved. She had reinvigorated him, strengthened him; new blood seemed in his veins, and she saw the metamorphosis.

She laughed a little triumphant laugh, and nestled closer against his breast as in her natural resting-place. . .

"Paper! paper! Extra special!

"Another terrible disaster: British troops taken prisoners, British defeated. Heavy losses."

The hoarse cry of the street-vender came up from below the windows and struck them as they stood there, like blows. Evelyn, without disengaging herself from his arms, raised her head and listened, her little firm hands clasped tightly on his sleeve. Neither spoke. The cry went on down the street, becoming

Evelyn Hastings

fainter and more muffled until it was swallowed up entirely in the fog. Then she looked up again at Durham with the same proud smile on her lips.

"British defeated!" she repeated scornfully. "You cannot defeat the British. You can quicken their stride to victory by blows, that's all."

She was standing quite erect now, and Durham, who had more than the average soldier's pride of his country, seized both her hands and kissed them in a passion of admiration and pleasure.

"Which do you love better, me or the Flag?" he asked her suddenly, looking into those eyes that the cry from the street had kindled into a flame of almost savage pride.

She drew away one hand from him, and flung her arm round his neck with an adorable, caressing gesture.

"Oh, what a question! I don't know; how can I tell?"

The Religion of

"Which?" he persisted, wringing the hand he still held.

She put her lips to his.

"The Flag," she murmured; "otherwise I should not be worthy of you."

Durham pressed the lips that had spoken, feeling himself transported with her enthusiasm and filled to running over with her energy. He had called her "his life." She seemed to be so. A fresh spring of it seemed welling up in his bosom as he held her there.

"You will come back—I know it," she added, and the words were so calm, so assured, so full of absolute conviction, that they had the weight of prophecy.

When Durham left her, he looked back on the interview with wonderment. He felt like a man who has sought a draught of water and has inadvertently drunk wine.

A few moments after, Lady Hastings came into the room and found Evelyn sitting motionless, absorbed in her thoughts, with

Evelyn Hastings

dilated eyes gazing through the heavily draped windows.

"Well, my dear child," she said kindly, "what have you arranged?"

"Ceoil has told me he leaves in five days, and wishes us to be married to-morrow morning," she answered quietly.

"And what did you say?" asked Lady Hastings anxiously.

"I consented."

"To-morrow morning! How unreasonable men are! What can you possibly wear? You have nothing at all suitable. Didn't you think of that?"

"No," answered Evelyn, with a little smile, "I did not think of that. But it doesn't matter; any dress will do. This one as well as any other."

Lady Hastings raised her eyebrows and looked down at her angrily.

"Really, Evelyn, you are too absurd, too frivolous. You don't attach enough importance

The Religion of

to the serious things of life. ' You must be properly dressed for a wedding, as you must be for a funeral. I won't have a daughter of mine unsuitably turned out for any occasion."

"I will wear whatever you tell me," Evelyn answered in a low tone.

"But you have nothing," remarked Lady Hastings crossly. "And I don't see what I can do for you in the time. Why didn't you put him off two or three days, till we had arranged things properly?"

"Two or three days, mamma! We have only five!" And she turned her eyes, large with sorrow and dark with apprehension, on her mother.

"Well, I should have thought you could well have spared three days out of five to ensure your being decently gowned. You ought not to let sentimental considerations stand in the way of what is right and fitting. I never do. However, it's done now. We must see Stanley

Evelyn Hastings

at once and find out really what you have got in the way of clothes."

Evelyn rose and crossed the room towards the door.

"Where are you going?" said Lady Hastings sharply. "I shall want you to consult with."

Evelyn looked back at her.

"Please, mamma, let me go. I know you and Stanley will arrange everything perfectly for me. I don't feel as if I could give my attention to—to my dress just now."

"Where are you going?" repeated her mother.

"Only to my room."

She looked suddenly so very white, so overstrained and fatigued, that Lady Hastings, a little dull towards mental emotions as she might be, but keenly sympathetic to all physical ills, assented, and Evelyn disappeared.

"Strange child she is," mused her mother. "Fancy taking no interest in her wedding gown!"

The Religion of

Upstairs, Evelyn had reached her room and locked the door, that it might have no communication with her dressing-room beyond, where she guessed her mother and her maid would soon be holding counsel over her wardrobe, and then flung herself on her knees by the bed.

"Bring him back to me safely," she murmured; and for hours there was no sound except that one sentence uttered over and over again, strenuously and passionately, in the empty room. Yet not empty to her, for God, her companion and friend, was always with her.

The next afternoon—for Lady Hastings had insisted it should not be till the afternoon—the marriage took place in the dark and heavy drawing-room of the house in Grosvenor Gardens. Evelyn entered the room when the few others who were to be present at the ceremony had all assembled, and her deadly pallor and the exalted expression of the eyes struck every one. The proverbial blushes and

Evelyn Hastings

smiles of a bride were absent; but instead there was a calm radiance, a peace and faith, stamped on the bloodless face that puzzled and amazed the onlookers.

"So Anny of her," whispered one of her friends to her mother. "She looks like a Christian martyr going to heaven."

Lady Hastings simply shrugged her shoulders, as if to disclaim all responsibility in possessing such a very odd daughter, but ever more occupied with her child's dress than her face, observed with satisfaction that the extremely simple white toilette became her admirably, and that she carried her white bouquet with proper grace. Durham alone of those in the room read her face, and saw that she came to her marriage as a young saint to her communion; he alone guessed that those wide-open eyes were so strangely luminous, the face so strangely white, because she had spent the night, not in sleep, but in prayer.

The ceremony was over in a very few

The Religion of

minutes, and Evelyn disappeared, while Lady Hastings dispensed the most delicate Souchong in little cups to the guests. Within an hour Evelyn was sitting beside Dufham in a hansom directed to his rooms, and her mother was sobbing on a friend's shoulder in Grosvenor Gardens.

"To think the dear child may so soon be left a widow," she murmured. "Or he may come back maimed, without his arm, or sightless—so dreadful! Then, she had to go away in a ready-made dress, poor child; I really couldn't help it, she gave me no time." And poor Lady Hastings, quite overcome, sobbed heavily. While she sat weeping on Lady Craven's shoulder, Evelyn herself, her face all light and radiance, was just stepping over the threshold of Dufham's dark, crowded, and it must be confessed untidy, rooms. But the dreary, comfortless aspect, in contrast to her own home affected Evelyn as little as did the ready-made gown, that overwhelmed her mother.

Evelyn Hastings

Truly there are invisible empires, sceptres, and crowns, as there are invisible crosses. Evelyn looked at her husband; she saw nothing else. She had entered into her kingdom.

As a matter of fact, the room they entered was a rather large and gloomy-looking sitting-room on the ground-floor. The ceiling was low and discoloured, the walls dingy, adorned with some equally dingy prints. Two narrow windows, draped with grey-brown curtains, looked out on Jermyn Street. The carpet was worn, and the furniture heavy and old-fashioned. A bright fire, however, burned cheerily at the end of the room, and threw a warm red light over everything. Evelyn crossed to it with her light, easy step, and Durham felt a nervous clutching at his heart as the poverty and discomfort of his rooms impressed themselves on him. The rustle of her silk under-skirts as she moved seemed to make the threadbare pattern of the carpet start out so clearly, and as she

The Religion of

removed her hat her fair hair, so elaborately done by her French maid, seemed a silent reproach to his discoloured walls. Evelyn flung herself into one of the old, roomy arm-chairs by the fire and looked round her with a merry smile.

"How lovely it is to be here! How delightful everything is!" she exclaimed.

Durham gazed at her under his pained, raised eyebrows.

"It's not good enough for you," he groaned. "I feel such a culprit to bring you to such a hole—look at the carpet and the paper." Things he had never even noticed before oppressed him now, and his nervous chagrin made him draw her attention to the very defects he hated her to see.

"Yes, and look at this!" returned Evelyn, with soft derision, pulling out a little bit of the stuffing that protruded itself through a crack in the leather of the chair arm. "Oh, don't you see," she added with immense

Evelyn Hastings

emotion, in spite of her laughter, "that *you* furnish the room?—that you are the chairs, and tables, and pictures, and everything else? Here is a riddle: what is the difference between this place where you are, and our place in Grosvenor Gardens where you were not?"

"Oh, Grosvenor Gardens was a palace, and this is a pigstye."

"No, that's not the answer. These are Furnished Rooms, and that was an Unfurnished House!"

Her voice was exceedingly soft and tender; it seemed to Durham he had never heard such tones before. He looked at her; he had never seen her so lovely, so seductive. He forgot that the maiden is but the half of the woman, that to look on a girl is to look at a flower closed. She leaned forward a little in her chair with her arms outstretched, her eyes were alight and glowing, her lips parted, her bosom heaving with

The Religion of

delighted love. Her heart seemed expanding within her and rushing out to him, and she no longer repressed it. Was she not his wife now? and had not they 'only five bare days snatched from the hand of Time? Had not she in that short space to give him all the joy and delight that other women could afford to measure out sparingly to their husbands, knowing the stock might have to last an ordinary lifetime?

Durham, intoxicated by that smile in the light-filled eyes, bent over her, and putting his arms round the slim, low waist, lifted her entirely out of her chair, and sat down with her on his knee. Evelyn laughed, knowing her own weight and build, and that only with the strength of passion and enthusiasm could Durham have lifted her like a doll; and Nature, who can be very, very kind as she can be cruel, was kind to them then. Each to the other formed a wall, behind which lay the grim Future, but

Evelyn Hastings

beyond which they could not see. Vision, mental and physical, stopped short at each other's eyes, and drowned itself there.

A discreet tap came at the door, and after a pause it was opened and the maid appeared to lay the dinner. Evelyn had disengaged herself from Durham's arms, and now stood, one elbow on the mantelpiece, looking down into the fire. The maid looked at her curiously out of the corners of her eyes, as she proceeded to clear the table and spread the cloth. She herself had often cast gay glances at the handsome officer as she dusted his rooms or set his lonely breakfasts—glances that she was convinced had never been even seen by his preoccupied eyes. She was a pretty girl, and she naturally now scanned with some curiosity the one whose image had doubtless rendered vain all her new caps and the clean shine of her face.

She took in Evelyn's figure and dress, her

The Religion of

hair, the lace at her throat, and the rings on her slim hands.

"Not so pretty as me in the face," was her comment; "but she's of his class, sure enough." She laid the spoons and forks upside down, and crossed the knives and spilt some of the salt, so absorbed was she in drawing these conclusions. "And that's a comfort," she added vaguely to herself, for she was a philosopher too, in her way, as much as Lady Hastings, and she knew that Class is greater than Beauty.

After dinner was over, Durham walked about the room in a restless way and looked at his watch two or three times. At last he came up behind the chair she was sitting in and took her face in both his hands.

"Evelyn, it's not very late: put a cloak on and we'll go down to one of the theatres."

Evelyn looked up in surprise.

"Why? I am very happy here, quite happy

Evelyn Hastings

with you. Why should we want to go to a theatre?"

"This is a dull hole for you to spend the first evening in. I'd like to take you; you say you've never seen a play. Come." He took her hand and pulled her out of the chair.

"Well, fetch my cloak then," she said, turning a little away with a delightful flush on her cheek. The servant had taken her things and put them into Durham's room. In a few seconds, in his impetuous way, Durham had her muffled up, and they were driving in a hansom down towards the Strand.

When she found herself in a stall beside Durham, looking on to the stage, Evelyn realised how very new she was to the world and the world's amusements. The girls had studied Shakespeare's plays at school, and Evelyn, by her own wish, had taken up Greek, and could read *Antigone* and *Medea* with ease; but how

The Religion of

different those cold, ponderous sermons on tombs and love philtres were from this rushing, dashing, musical comedy that Durham had brought her to, where all the characters were on the stage at once, flying through innumerable side-doors and dodging behind pieces of drawing-room furniture. She did not understand nor follow the piece at all, nor want to. She was far too absorbed in her thoughts and a furtive study of her husband's side face, which seemed to her the most beautiful thing in the world. And it was hers, her own! that was what seemed to her so wonderful. How could a few words spoken by a clergyman in the drawing-room that afternoon have made so much difference? made her the possessor of this *chef d'œuvre* of creation, a human being with whom henceforward her life, her whole personality, was to be so intimately connected. She, too, had so much to do before her which delighted her. Evelyn was quick enough to know she had won his passion; but there was so much still

Evelyn Hastings

to conquer: his affection, his trust, his confidence, his esteem, and his—dependence. True, she had all these presumptively, but they were not really her own yet. They were hers only, so to speak, on the hire system, and she would have to make many payments in devotion before they were irrevocably hers. That she realised this on her wedding-day was greatly in her favour. The majority of wives do not. They think by their marriage they have bought those goods, which in reality are only theirs on credit. They neglect their payments, and the goods are taken back. She sat still in her chair, laughing when Durham laughed, which was often, and praying earnestly about her future life when she was supposed to be listening to the comic business of the stage. When the end came, she rose and felt Durham wrap her in her cloak in a delightful dream. She was excited, radiant, and longed for the moment when Durham should lean over her in the hansom and kiss her, as he had done in coming

The Religion of

"We are not going back to those dingy old rooms of mine," he said, as he put her into the cab and took his place beside her. "We will stay at the 'Walton' for supper, and to-night anyway. You are not to protest," he said, laughing and effectually preventing her doing so. He slipped his arm round her, and they drove on in silence. When they reached the "Walton," Evelyn went, by Durham's directions, into the waiting-room, and sank down into one of the capacious chairs that enfolded her like a bed. Rose-shaded lights were everywhere; a string band was playing; the room stretched away on every side, a vista of luxury and colour. Some women were near her, she took no notice of them; some men passed, and she felt them look at her. She saw nothing until Durham's figure came in view advancing towards her.

"Come along, little girl, you must be starving, you would not eat any dinner," he said, and as she got up, he drew her arm through his, and they crossed the long waiting-room together.

Evelyn Hastings

They went through the supper-room and found a little alcove by one of the windows with a table for two in it. Here they sat down, Evelyn facing the room, and looking with bright, eager eyes over the gay scene of colour and light it presented; then they came back as eagerly, and rested on Durham with that look of delight and inquiry which was so dear to him. For a moment her passionate pleasure became so great that unconsciously she sank into a prayer of thankfulness as she was accustomed to when very happy, and while Durham spoke to the waiter and studied the *menu* she was lost in herself. He looked up and caught her curious expression as the man departed with his orders.

"Evelyn!" he said in surprise, "what are you thinking of?"

"I was praying," she answered simply.

Durham's face clouded.

"Why? were you saying grace, or what?"

Evelyn raised her eyebrows.

The Religion of

"No, oh no; just praying in a general way. Just talking to God about the room and things, and saying I was so happy."

Durham stared at her in utter astonishment for a few seconds, which Evelyn employed in thinking how handsome he was, and what perfectly beautiful eyebrows he possessed.

"I hope you are not one of those awfully religious women who will be always worrying me to go to church," he said, at last, in a dissatisfied tone.

Evelyn laughed.

"Oh, you need not be afraid, I hate going to church myself."

"Hate going to church! Why?"

"It interrupts my prayers," she answered simply, without any intention of uttering a paradox; then, catching Durham's mystified and rather vexed expression, for when a man does not quite understand anything he immediately begins to be angry with it, she added:

"There's something so false, so superficial

Evelyn Hastings

about all churches and church-going, all the outward forms of religion, that it annoys me; and as I always pray so much wherever I am, it seems absurd to me to drive to a particular place on a particular day, and go through with a few set speeches, that's all."

The waiter, coming back with the oysters and champagne and hovering round their table, interrupted them, and Evelyn did not resume the subject.

Durham contemplated her with delight for the rest of the supper as she sat opposite him. This was a charming presence to have in his life. She was so dainty and graceful, and she seemed different from most women he had met. He was sure she could feel more. Of all emotions, the attraction of one human being to another is the most difficult to analyse, to explain. But one factor in the quality of attractiveness is certain and invariable—the capacity for feeling. It is what a man seeks unconsciously in a woman, it is

The Religion of

what delights a woman in a man. And Evelyn had the capacity of emotion written in her delicate, serious face and in her warm, varying eyes. They shone upon Durham now large with pleasure and excitement like sapphires in the blaze of white light of the supper-room. A pain that was very like terror clutched at his heart as he thought of this possession for five days, and then . . . never perhaps again; minutes, seconds were precious and they were dancing by, and he could not hold them. His throat was dry and his eyes hot as he looked at her, and his voice was almost savage as he said abruptly:

"It's past midnight, Evelyn; finish your wine, and let's go to our room."

Evelyn glanced at him quickly and rose at once. When they reached the outside corridor, which was empty, she slipped her arm through his and pressed close to his side.

"Are you annoyed with me about anything?"

Evelyn Hastings

"No, no, no!" Durham answered, pressing her to him till the clasp hurt her; "I am only beside myself at having you and losing you."

"You can't lose me," Evelyn whispered back, smiling; "I'm part of yourself."

They walked on down the passage. All seemed strange and unreal to Evelyn. She was only really conscious of overwhelming happiness. "Fancy marrying for anything but this," she thought, "when this is so wonderful, so exquisite—this loving and being loved. Whatever happens, I shall have had this."

Their room was ~~at the~~ end of the passage, and Durham went forward and opened the door with the key.

On the threshold Evelyn paused for a moment. "Oh!" she said suddenly and then stopped. She looked round. Where had she seen this room before? Just such a room as she admired with long bright mirrors and

Religion of Evelyn Hastings

duck's-egg coloured china, and a large bed with rich curtains lined with rose. Then she went forward with a smile, and her feet sank into a soft carpet. She recollected: this was very much like Madam's room, which has struck her fancy so much, and for which she had prayed. So it was quite natural. It was her room now, and—she glanced shyly at Durham—she shared it with some one more interesting than Monsieur.

CHAPTER V.

THE next morning they breakfasted in their room, to avoid being seen in their evening clothes. To Evelyn, it seemed as if she had never had a breakfast till now, never fallen asleep, never wakened up, never existed at all, in fact, till now. Everything was so new, so strange, so wonderful and delightful. Life doubled! To be no longer ~~sitting~~ in any action, no longer independent, to do and think and feel ~~everything~~ in a relative, instead of an absolute manner! She washed her face in the green-blue bowl, thinking over things she was deeply interested in; and as her thoughts flew back to Mademoiselle at the school, she pitied her from the bottom of her heart with overwhelming pity. But how strange that

The Religion of

the mere presence of another being, should be so delighting, so all-satisfying. While Durham was in the room walking backwards and forwards dressing, it was as if the sun were shining into it. When he went outside for a moment to order the breakfast, and she was left alone, the room seemed black as when the sun goes in.

When Evelyn had finished her own dressing, she sat down on the couch that was at the foot of the bed and watched him. He was standing before the long glass in the wardrobe, shaving. It was these details of everyday life that brought home her new position to Evelyn, and filled her with amused pleasure. It sent a curious thrill through her when he approached her at the dressing-table, and asked her to lend him the comb that a thoughtful chambermaid had provided for her. And just before she had drawn on her bodice, he had pressed a kiss on her bare shoulder as he passed her; it had sent a shudder of pleasure

Evelyn Hastings

over her, and the pleasure and the novelty of it astounded her. She trembled and sank down on a chair in silence.

"What I should have lost if I had married Lord Strathmore!" she thought, wonderingly; "and mamma was surprised that I didn't! Some people *do* marry for money. How can they? To feel as I feel now is worth thousands and thousands of pounds."

She continued to gaze at Durham from the couch, her eyes large with curious speculation. He finished his shaving, and as he reached the collar-and-tie stage of his dressing, he looked across at her in the glass.

"Why don't you say your prayers?" he said chaffingly, "instead of wasting your time looking at me? It seems as if you had forgotten them last night and this morning."

"I couldn't forget them," Evelyn answered, smiling; "but I never kneel down for five minutes night and morning as some people do. You see, if I were to kneel whenever I prayed,

The Religion of

I should be kneeling all the time, for I'm always praying more or less—that's my life."

"You are the strangest little girl I ever knew," returned Durham, drawing on his coat. He took the breakfast-tray in from the rug outside, and they put it across the corner of the dressing-table and sat down to it.

After breakfast they drove back straight to Durham's lodgings in Jermyn Street. It was a raw, foggy morning, and they sat close together with the glass pulled down before them.

"I'm sorry we have to go back to a gloomy pigeon-hole," murmured Durham, pressing her little hand that rested on his knee.

"It can't be gloomy anywhere where you are," Evelyn answered, nestling still closer to him. She had the one essential in life, and she was wise enough to know it and be blind to the absence of the details of happiness.

"I have so much to do," he went on with a sigh, "in the time. I shall hardly get through it. I've got to go to my agents this morning as

Evelyn Hastings

soon as I've changed my clothes, and there's an awful lot of sorting amongst my papers to do. I can't drag them all out with me, and I don't want to warehouse them."

"I can do it for you, perhaps," murmured Evelyn; "and all your packing I can do."

After a hasty change of his clothes at the rooms, and a very lingering good-bye for this separation of a few hours, Durham drove down to the city and Evelyn was left alone.

He had pointed out some things in his room to her, some trunks and a despatch box he wanted emptied, and Evelyn took the latter and carried it into the sitting-room to sort and clear out by the fire. She left the box on the rug at her feet and sat down in one of the arm-chairs. The air was cold, and she felt tired and worn out. For an hour she lay there in a trance of dreamy contentment, to be merely quiet, and then the clock striking outside roused her. She knelt down on the rug,

The Religion of

turned the key in the box, and opened it. It was quite full, and at the top lay bundles of letters, addressed in different handwritings, and she felt they were women's.

"Hateful, hateful, hateful!" she thought to herself, as she took them out with a feeling of loathing and laid them on the carpet. "But these have never been to him what I shall be—never!"

Durham had asked her to sort the box, putting back into it cheque-books, accounts, and business papers, and leaving out personal letters to be burned. "All past, dead rubbish," he had said. "Everything is dead ~~to~~ me now except you." Evelyn had guessed the nature of the letters and liked his absolute confidence in her. She laid them aside now, together with old flowers, gloves, fans, and photographs, for him to do what he liked with when he came back. Then she packed the box to half its capacity with the other things, and passed to the trunks in the adjoining room.

Evelyn Hastings

It was three o'clock when she had finished. She was faint and cold from want of her luncheon, but she did not think of having it till he returned. He came in soon after, looking white and haggard.

"I couldn't get back before," he explained. "You shouldn't have waited." But he liked her better because she had, and the three neatly sorted boxes appealed to him.

His face clouded as he noted the heap of tender souvenirs by the grate, and he picked them up by handfuls and stuffed them into the fire.

"A lot of beastly rot," he muttered, and Evelyn watched them blaze and smoulder in silence.

"The end of passion," she thought to herself. "Well, there shall be more than passion between us."

They had their luncheon together on the table drawn close to the fire, and drew their chairs together side by side. Proximity was

The Religion of

ludicrously essential to them, these two, whom thousands of miles were so soon to separate.

Durham talked of what he had done that day, and Evelyn listened. There was much that she did not fully understand in what he said. Business details, the arrangements he was going to make, what his agents had said, and so on. All was to a certain extent confusing to her. She was so new to the practical everyday life of the world. But she rarely troubled him to explain or repeat anything. She trusted to her own quick intuition and powers of drawing deductions.

Durham was quite surprised to find how pleasant it was to have a sympathetic, intelligent listener beside him. He felt so rested, so wonderfully rested.

After luncheon he had to go out again. Part of his outfit was not ready, and he had to go and see after it. He wanted to take her with him.

Evelyn Hastings

Evelyn laughed. "But I know nothing of these things. I shall be only in the way."

"Come with me," was his answer. "I like to feel you beside me."

And they drove about all the afternoon together.

In spite of what she had said, Evelyn was a help to him. He was quite surprised at her suggestions and the wit with which she made decisions, foreseeing the uses for things he had not thought of, and disadvantages very often which had not occurred to him.

"How used I to choose or buy things without you?" he said, laughing, as they drove home at last.

"How used I to exist at all without you?" she returned, laughing too, and her eyes shone like blue stars in the darkness of the cab.

They dined at home and alone that evening. After, Durham wanted to take her to the theatre again, with his persistent idea of "amusing her"; but Evelyn was so tired,

The Religion of

she could not keep her eyes open, and after they had moved from the table to the fire and were sitting in the one comfortable chair there was, she pulled his arms round her to form a cradle and went to sleep on his breast, worn out with the strain of holding off from her, as it were, the crushing rock of grief overshadowing her and about to fall.

Durham sat motionless, with his arms about her, and his chin sunk on her soft head, listening to the gentle, regular breathing and feeling her heart beat on his.

It was curious to have come suddenly into such a kingdom of love as this which Evelyn made round him. A devotion such as was given him here had never been his before, and he felt would never be again. He had been loved many times, but there had always been some alloy of self-interest in those other loves. This was something of a nature wholly different, not to be estimated lightly. He sat there far into the night, unwilling to disturb her, and her

Evelyn Hastings

slight sighing breath came and went, that breath which he knew would be relinquished happily, even with delight, for him or in his service.

It is a curious knowledge.

The five days spent with Evelyn were a revelation to Durham, an education beyond any he had received at Eton, Oxford, in the Army, or in the world. The other women in his life had been as shadows beside her; power over him had passed into and slipped out of their hands. With her, he felt it would be hers till she threw it away.

No other woman had loved him with the same absorption, the same passionate self-surrender that she did. He had never laid his head on a breast so ardent, nor felt the heart beneath it leap with joy at his mere touch. This *religieuse*, this statue, this girl who would hardly extend her finger-tips to any one before her marriage, had become the very embodiment of radiant life. Sitting near

The Religion of

her at times, moving her with his words or delighting her with his caresses, he felt something akin to the proud exultation of the electrician, or the engineer, of any one in the presence of a Force, a force mightier, stronger than they, which they control, which they have called into being—at least drawn from its potential state. This ardour of love, this passionate force which involved her whole being, was indeed a force in her, but he had been the one to unchain it, to render it visible and active, and he had the supreme control over it.

It was Evelyn's absence of all thought of self in her relations with Durham that gave her such a hold upon him. She did not seem to have, or wish to have, any individuality apart from him; she was willing and able to merge herself entirely in him. One might think, when a stronger and a weaker nature come together, that the stronger one, in maintaining its own individuality and, as it were,

Evelyn Hastings

standing upon its own strength, would in that way more easily maintain its own advantages and, so to speak, be able to drive the weaker one and control it. As a matter of fact, just the opposite holds good. The weaker one always resents being controlled and driven, when the stronger one stands apart from it. It is only where the stronger merges itself in the weaker, and so, out of two identities, makes one in which the stronger half naturally predominates, that any one nature can attain any great degree of influence over another. Durham felt that, with Evelyn, a new element had come into his life, almost a new constituent into his being. So much so, that he felt surprised as to how he could have existed without her. In those few days a wonderful intimacy of mind sprang up between them. It literally seemed that they had only one, which was the fact; for Evelyn had given him hers, and he had taken it and unconsciously fused it with his own. Evelyn,

The Religion of

in her entire abandonment of self, of all her own thoughts, ideas, and wishes, in apparently giving up everything had gained everything.

Durham consulted her and adopted her views, thought her thoughts and wished her wishes; and all quite unconsciously, simply because her mind had become part of his own. Evelyn was younger than Durham; she was thirteen years nearer the fount of life than he was, and full of its passionate freshness. He had more experience and more knowledge; she had infinitely more imagination and intuition; and the ardent force of her emotions while they lasted, her instinctive convictions, and keen perceptions simply amazed him, whose forces were beginning to tire and who had been accustomed to rely entirely upon experience as a guide for existence.

They hung upon the minutes as they passed. Evelyn sometimes, even involuntarily, stretched out her hands as if to catch and hold them as they slipped by. It was after one of these

Evelyn Hastings

movements, when her arms had fallen despairingly at her sides, that she looked across at Durham with fear in her eyes.

"How shall I be able to let you go? It will be exactly as if a limb were torn off me." It was after dinner on the third night after their marriage. "Our minds have got so mixed up," she went on reflectively; "you have got mine now, and you will have to take it with you. I don't believe we could sort them ~~out~~ now if we tried. I shall be left without you, and without part of myself too. It is very dreadful. One ought not to care so much for anybody."

She was leaning back in the chair in an attitude of great fatigue, her arm hung over the chair-arm, and she looked away to the fire. It occurred to her suddenly how often she had prayed for this very thing, for some one to care for "more, much more than herself." "And," she thought, "even the gods themselves cannot take back their gifts."

The Religion of

Durham had not said anything. Whatever he felt or thought at any time, he had not Evelyn's habit of expressing it in words.

Evelyn looked back again at the face opposite her. With the horror of the approaching separation upon her, she was just beginning to realise the terrific burden that all great emotions enfold within themselves, and so feel a little frightened. Later, she would understand that which indeed she already dimly felt: that emotions—burden and all—were infinitely preferable to empty arms.

"Yes, I feel a robber and a brute. I knew I should. I have taken everything from you just for these five days."

"I am only so glad to have given you what I could," she answered, with a faint smile. Then there was silence again, and she gazed away from him into the fire. She was thinking she had not given him the best part of herself, as she considered—her religion; and she was wondering within herself whether she could do

Evelyn Hastings

so now—whether she ought to, could, and should speak to him of it. Could she impart to him her religion—the religion of the Voice—and tell him that scene in her childhood which had had such a grip on her own life and moulded all her character? It was, after all, just a little, short, bald incident; there seemed little in it, but there it was. One could not get away from it. Some influence had controlled and guided her, a simple, unconscious child. A voice had spoken to her then, an influence had been upon her. What was it, if not the voice and influence of the Deity? How would Durham himself explain it? He was a materialist, she knew, of the most ordinary type; the type that goes to church docilely every Sunday, repeats prayers of which it has no realisation, and has no conception of—no belief in the possibility of any power inside man or outside him, except that of flesh and blood, of visible and tangible things. Evelyn gazed across at his handsome, careless face

The Religion of

now with a curious scrutiny; but some instinct held her back from speaking. It was not the season. She felt in a pained way that there was a veil, a curtain between her soul and his, and only one Hand could raise it. Belief is a divine gift, like genius, to individuals, and they cannot hand it about amongst themselves, much though they may desire to give and to receive. Therefore she said nothing, and Durham thought, in the possession of her tangible, loving self, and the rejoicing of the senses, he had gained everything. Of that white flame the Soul, at present he knew and cared nothing; and Evelyn saw, and knew exactly what he felt and thought, and could wait.

On the morning of the last day before their separation, Evelyn awoke very early with the iron grip of pain upon her heart. There was only a little grey light in the room as yet, but she was restless with mental pain, and she rose silently, and in a dressing-gown walked into the

Evelyn Hastings

large sitting-room. The blinds were down and the room grey and cold. No one was yet stirring in the house.

She sat down in one of the old chairs, and gripped each arm with her hand. She felt paralysed at the realisation that it was the last day. It seemed as if the bonds that bound her to Durham were physical bands of flesh, and to sever them meant death to herself. She closed her eyes, leaning her head back in the chair, sick with pain.

"God! won't you come to me--help me? I cannot bear it! Why do you make me suffer so much?"

Her brain seemed blank for some minutes; then there gradually stole into it a thought, an answer.

"You prayed to have much to feel, much to suffer. This suffering is but the inevitable price of the five days just past. You suffer more than many others because you enjoy more. Great joy in possession means great

The Religion of

sorrow in loss; this is the law of the world. The proportions cannot be broken."

Evelyn unclosed her eyes. The room was very grey and quiet. No one had been speaking; she had only been thinking. But she felt blessed and comforted. It seemed as if a beneficent influence were near her.

"Help me, be near me!" she murmured, stretching out her arms, and the relieving tears came slowly to her eyes.

The maid came in presently to dust the room and lay the fire, and Evelyn went back to dress.

At breakfast she drank her tea, but she could eat nothing. Durham looked at her with anxiety. Her face was white, almost transparent, and in the large eyes, torn wide open with suffering, the pupils had dilated until the sunny blue of the iris was almost eclipsed. They were fixed upon him with a look of passionate absorption that Durham had never seen before.

Evelyn Hastings

"Dear little girl," he said, stretching out his hand to hers across the corner of the table, "I am sorry you suffer so much."

She laid her very slender, nervous little white hand in his, which closed over it in a firm, warm clasp.

"I am glad," she said simply. "I did resent it; but I understand now. What I feel now is, after all, the promise of the intense joy I shall have when you come back to me."

Durham did not answer. He only looked at her, pained and troubled with the thought he might not come back to her.

Evelyn divined his thought.

"Yes you will," she persisted. "You *cannot* get killed; my prayers will be perpetually between you and death."

Durham gazed at her curiously. She looked wonderfully ethereal, spiritual, in that moment, and she had such a passionate force of conviction within herself, that it was difficult

The Religion of

to hear her and not be at least momentarily impressed.

"You are going to hover round me, as my guardian angel?" he said, smiling.

"I shall not be allowed to come to you, I'm afraid," Evelyn answered, with a little smile in return. "But He shall give His angels charge over thee," she added in a low voice.

There was silence, and their hands were still clasped in each other's.

Then Durham said restlessly:

"I don't see, Evelyn, how you can explain it to yourself. Look here, if prayer really had any power we should all be standing up in the field and the bullets would be hitting us and no one would be killed: it would be a miracle."

"Well, but don't you see, it would equally be a miracle if you could get everybody to be prayed for as I shall pray for you. You could not get a mass of people together, all of whom would be praying every minute.

Evelyn Hastings

If you could, no one can say what would happen."

Evelyn had all the doggedness and exclusiveness of vision of her youth, which carries a certain strength with it. Durham was too sore at heart to argue, and nothing could give him belief, any more than anything could shake hers; so he only bent forward and kissed the sweet little mouth he loved, and said:

"Pray for me, darling, if you like."

And they both rose to the practical work of the day.

Durham was out a great deal, and Evelyn pushed on with his packing, for him, alone. She was delighted to be serving him, and knelt by the empty trunks folding and laying in his things in a strange mixture of happiness and pain. She often paused for a moment in her work, and leaning one elbow on the box-edge, stared absently down, thinking. Those five days, how wonderful they had

The Religion of

been! Gay, vivid days of absorbing feeling! What a series of varied, changing emotions had been strung along through them! How keenly alive she had been! how acutely conscious of living, how sensitive to both pleasure and pain! And what moments there had been in them!—moments of anticipation, of realisation, of passionate pleasure, of triumph, of self-surrender.

When Durham came in, he surprised her in one of these fits of abstraction, and was astonished at the rapt look on her face as she raised it to his. They packed the remainder of the box together, and then rang for some tea to be sent up, which they drank sitting on the closed lid.

It was late in the evening when they had finished everything. The rooms had at last that most miserable of all appearances—a “cleared up” look. The centre-table was dusty and littered with little ends of string; a bunch of the same for which there was

Evelyn Hastings

no further use lay in the middle. Packed and strapped trunks were against the wall. The fire had gone down from neglect in the ashy grate. The fireplace itself was filled with old papers, torn-up letters and bills.

They sat down, white-faced and fatigued, and looked at each other miserably.

"It's wretched—miserable, this," Durham broke out, letting his head drop on his hand.

But Evelyn was braver.

"It has been worth it," was all she said, and her white lips smiled.

They both felt intensely unhappy, which was a pledge of their still having the capacity to feel happy—the greatest gift next to happiness itself, in this world. Neither of them had any philosophy, which was a very good thing for them. Philosophy indeed is the blight of life. It is a mental cocaine which deadens the nerves to pain, it is true, but a

Religion of Evelyn Hastings

dead nerve cannot quiver with either joy or pain.

Out of the many and varied, beautifully-hued and tinted, threads of life, philosophy can only weave a dull grey fabric, even in tone and texture, evenly displeasing.

CHAPTER VI.

THE following morning, in the grey and deadly cold of the early hours, Evelyn, shivering in her furs, entered her mother's carriage, drawn up at the station platform. The door closed with a snap. The direction to Grosvenor Gardens was taken, and Evelyn fell back against the cushions, the sobs she had suppressed and conquered so long breaking from her—sobs which seemed to tear her heart out of her breast, and drenched her pale face beneath the heavy veil. Durham had gone, the regiment had gone. The rooms in Jermyn Street were given up. The five days spent there seemed like a dream, vivid and violent, that had troubled the sleep of her maidenhood, and from which she now awoke in a dark night, alone, trembling and lonely.

The Religion of

She dreaded the return to her home, dreaded to take up the burden of the long, empty, useless days, the senseless round of dressing and dining and teaing and gossip, the squirrel's exercising wheel, in which one runs ceaselessly without getting anywhere. No stay, no anchor, no grip on the realities of life, nothing to hope for till Durham came back. She felt the taking up of her single life again acutely. Above all, she felt it in her mother's presence; so much so, that she begged to have a sitting-room entirely to herself, in which she might spend her time undisturbed by her mother's friends. Friends of her own she had none, and desired none. Lady Hastings blandly acquiesced, as was her rule, with Evelyn's extraordinary whims, and a little drawing-room, daintily fitted up in blue satin, was arranged for her, opening out of her bedroom and dressing-room. Here Evelyn spent her time. It was her oratory. There was no crucifix visible, no shrine, no candles nor

Evelyn Hastings

flowers arranged on side-tables, no Bibles, books, nor rosaries anywhere to be seen; but, none the less, it was a temple of the most earnest, passionate prayer that has ever ascended to any deity.

Up and down, up and down the pretty little room the girl walked for hours, completely lost in the prayers that she believed were like armour put round the absent one. At other times she wrote letters there to Durham, or lay back in her chair, looking through half-closed lids at the fire, and living over again as far as she could the five days she had known of life. She did a little wool-work now and then to please her mother, who impressed upon her that doing nothing when one was alone was a waste of time. Why doing nothing in the society of others, as her mother did afternoon after afternoon when callers came to four o'clock tea, was any more profitable, Evelyn never understood, nor did she inquire.

The strain of her intense prayer was so great,

The Religion of

that at night she fell into a dull, heavy sleep, like one who has worked all day. But she was glad to think that her thoughts and mental life were all devoted to Durham. It was a comfort in its way. "It's the only thing I can do for him," she said to herself constantly, "the only thing I can do."

One afternoon, about a month after Durham had gone, Evelyn was sitting in her own little drawing-room, with her work-basket open on a round table by her, when Maud Stevens was shown in. Evelyn rose, and the two women who had parted last in the schoolroom, stood facing each other. In spite of her pallor and strained expression, Evelyn had the air of life and grace that only women who have been loved possess. The other seemed still wrapped in the heavy dulness of unawakened girlhood. They exchanged greetings and sat down opposite each other.

"It is so sad for you, I pity you so much," murmured Miss Stevens, who nearly died with

Evelyn Hastings

envy of Evelyn each time her eye caught the glint of the latter's wedding-ring.

Evelyn looked up brightly from her basket, in which she was laying back some warm coloured wools.

"What is so sad?" she inquired, fixing her eyes on the other's face.

"Why—well—your being parted so soon after your marriage," faltered Maud, disconcerted by the radiant, trustful peace of the other's face.

"Yes, it is. But then he is coming back," replied Evelyn, again turning to her wools.

The accent of commonplace certainty in her tone deceived her hearer, who thought it must spring from some commonplace security.

"Oh! when?"

"When he has done his duty, and his country has done with him," returned Evelyn calmly.

Miss Stevens smiled superciliously.

"Oh yes, of course we all hope so; but then

The Religion of

you can never tell." And with a sigh, "So many never come back."

"I am quite certain he will, because, you see, I have prayed that he may," replied Evelyn, sorting her wools, and a certain firmness coming into the sad, drooping lines of her mouth.

"I don't see that makes any difference. I'm sure I've prayed for lots of things I've never got," Maud answered, digging viciously at the carpet with the point of her parasol. "I don't believe in prayers."

"Perhaps that's why they are so unsuccessful," Evelyn answered, with a joyous little laugh, and the look that was in her eyes as she raised them seemed suddenly more enviable to the girl opposite her than even her wedding-ring.

"But surely you don't think you'll get everything you want by just asking for it, do you?" she answered, with wide-open eyes; "that's ridiculous—nobody does."

Evelyn Hastings

"I always have," returned Evelyn steadily, leaning back in her chair.

"But you might ask for all sorts of impossible things; for instance, if you lost your arm, you might pray it would grow again."

"Yes, I might; but I shouldn't."

"Well, but why?"

"Because I don't believe that God is omnipotent."

"Oh, Evelyn!" and Miss Stevens sat bolt upright, looking white and shocked.

"You've just admitted the same thing."

"I? I should never say such a thing!"

"Well, you talked about impossible things: omnipotence knows no impossibility."

"Oh, that's different; you mix things up so, and turn them round. You always are hateful when you argue, and I think you're very wicked and irreligious," wound up Maud indignantly.

Evelyn smiled.

"Don't be angry, Maud. I don't want to

The Religion of

argue. I should like to make my religion as clear and as real to you as it is to me. You can't think what it means to one's life; you don't know how it has helped me lately. But for it, I should have killed myself when Durham left me."

Maud looked shocked again, also offended.

"I should think I'm a good deal more religious than you are," she said huffily.

"Perhaps so; but my religion makes me so happy, yours has no effect on you."

"I don't see how you can be very religious when you say such dreadful things, and think God isn't all-powerful."

"That is the key-note of my religion; that seems to me to explain so many things, to make it possible to love God, and to think Him all-wise and all-merciful as I do; whereas if you believe Him omnipotent, and then look round and see all the horrible suffering, the cruelty, the torture of animals, the atrocity, the injustice, the pain of the world, if you think He can

Evelyn Hastings

remove all that and does not, then it seems impossible to believe Him merciful or wise."

"Yet we're always taught that He has His own reasons for all that, which we cannot understand," returned Maud slowly.

"But that seems to me such a roundabout way of excusing it all, and to me it seems so obvious that God—that is, the Power of Good—is not omnipotent. If it were so it would be opposite to everything else we see in the world. The dual character is in everything: the opposition of good and bad, it enters into every part of the universal scheme. Look at the human being alone—his depths of cruelty and his heights of heroism, it is so absurd to trace it all to the same source. The only way you can explain it is by supposing two powers—one for evil, the other for good, fighting against each other, perpetually and with pretty even forces, so that the victory is never decided."

"That comes round, then, to the old idea

The Religion of

we've always had, of God and Satan; I don't see much originality in that," remarked Miss Stevens discontentedly.

"God and Satan were and are very convenient words for designating the opposing forces of good and evil; there's no objection to them," Evelyn answered calmly. "What I do dislike in the ordinary Christian religion is the idea of God being omnipotent; because if He were so, why should He let Satan fight against Him at all? That does not seem explained or explainable. The one great bulwark of my religion is that He is not omnipotent. He is just a great, good, dear Father; very, very powerful, but not almighty; and He feels just as sorry as I do for all the misery in this world, and would stop it in a minute if He could, but He cannot. My attitude to Him is that of a child to its father. An intelligent child does not go crying to its father for the sun; he knows it cannot be given to him; but he asks for things the father can give, things

Evelyn Hastings

quite beyond his own powers of attainment, and he hopes and believes his father will give them, and the father does."

"*Sometimes*," remarked Miss Stevens sarcastically, "and sometimes not; that uncertainty about their donations seems a peculiarity which fathers, divine and human, possess in common!"

"Arising from the uncertainty of the conduct of the child," answered Evelyn, quietly, "the child must be in close and loving relations with its father, study his wishes, and try to please him. I am, or believe I am, in close touch with my Father, and he is always ready to listen to me. It's all quite simple and natural—a humble, homespun religion, with nothing high-flown about it."

"But how do you study His wishes and try to please Him, and how do you know what He wants?"

"My God is a God of kindness," answered Evelyn softly, "and I do try to be kind—that's all I can do."

The Religion of

"And you believe that you'll go to Heaven, and all that, I suppose?" pursued Miss Stevens, disappointed at finding her friend so orthodox after all.

"I never trouble about that; God takes care of me while I am alive, and He is always near me, so I suppose He will take care of me and be near me when I die. I feel so safe, so secure, always, nothing matters to me. It's like," she went on dreamily, looking past her friend into space, "living with a great Hand always over you, within the shelter of its palm. Some day it may lift you up and place you elsewhere, but that does not matter, its touch will always be kind."

There was silence. Evelyn's face was transfigured, and Miss Stevens gazed at it fascinated. There was something certainly here in this religion—some real, vital essence that made it quite different from her own, contained in a morocco Bible and handsome Church Service, and carried in them by her to church every

Evelyn Hastings

Sunday, and as regularly carried back and put away in the top corner-drawer of her bedroom.

"I almost wish I were like you," she said involuntarily, after a minute, and then flushed and added hastily, "and had your religion."

She remembered she had always wished to be like Evelyn; to possess her clear white skin in exchange for her neckles, her art of looking attractive when she had really no right to, and other things of the sort. It occurred to her now in a flash, staring at Evelyn's face against the chair-back opposite her, that the something which she had never known and never envied her for, was the most valuable of all. She had often wondered what it was that seemed so to glorify Evelyn's simple, quiet face to an oval of beauty; now she saw the flood of light in the eyes, the sweetness on the mouth, the tranquillity on the forehead, and understood.

"I should like to share it with you," returned

The Religion of

Evelyn softly; "it is too good a thing to keep to one's self."

"Well, would—would it be any use, do you think, for me to pray to get rid of my freckles, for instance?" said Miss Stevens, blushing furiously, and dreadfully afraid that Evelyn would laugh.

But Evelyn looked at her quite seriously; *tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*, and Evelyn had lived so much with God that she viewed humanity as He does all comprehending and all pardoning.

"No," she said very gently, "I don't think it would yet, nor any prayer you made. You see, you are not in touch with God; you are not in the habit of praying and believing in, and waiting for, the answer. You could not expect God to hear a haphazard prayer like that; He might or He might not. It would prove nothing either way. But you must pray for everything you want, and you must work your hardest too; you must do everything you can to get for

Evelyn Hastings

yourself what you are praying for, or you can't expect God to hear you, any more than a father would pay any attention to a tiresome child that sat down and screamed for something, without making any effort to get it for himself. But if you work very hard and pray very hard, and believe and think about God a great deal, and are always kind, you will find your prayer answered in time."

Maud looked grave. :

"It's very difficult," she said, after a minute.

"Everything in life is difficult," replied Evelyn, simply.

"You've got quite a little religion of your own," Maud said after a minute, curiously and enviously; "I wish you'd write it down for me."

Evelyn arched her eyebrows.

"But there's so little, there's nothing to write. Love in your heart, belief in your brain, and a prayer on your lips—that's all it comes to, that's all there is."

"Oh yes, I shan't remember what you've

The Religion of

said now. You might write down what one has to believe and what one has to do, and I'd just learn it and try to see if it did me any good."

Maud was drawing on her gloves. She was going to a tea, where there was all the attraction of new dresses, possible flirtations, gossip, scandal, unkind remarks, and agonies of jealousy, but she was really interested in this new religious idea. There might be something in it that was better than the above list; and she looked pleadingly at the tranquil face opposite her, that looked proud and calm and peaceful in the consciousness of a great possession.

"Well, I might write something for you," Evelyn said slowly, "if you really wish it; but I have so little to do with books, as you see, and I don't believe I can formulate a religion for you."

"Yes you can," said Maud brightly, getting up; "you'll write out a nice little bible

Evelyn Hastings

for me, and then I shall know what to do. I shan't forget what you've said, and I shall call in to-morrow for it about this time."

Evelyn laughed, and they shook hands.

"I'm going to Mrs. Gerald's to a tea; I wish you were coming."

"I am so thankful I am not," returned Evelyn, with a little shudder of vicarious *ennui*, and the girls parted.

The following afternoon Maud presented herself again. She was so eager about her new idea that she even forgot to talk of the tea. She saw Evelyn sitting in her chair, apparently doing nothing, and she guessed she was praying.

"Well?" she said, gazing at her curiously.

"Here is your bible," Evelyn said quietly, and she drew out of the bosom of her dress a sheet of writing-paper folded together.

Maud took it and turned it over. On it she read:—

The Religionist

EVELYN'S BIBLE.

Articles of Belief.

1. The God of this religion is the God of kindness.
2. He is not omnipotent.
3. He cannot prevent the pain of the world.
4. The extent of His power is unknown.
5. He answers prayer, but only according to His powers and desires.
6. He stands in the relation to man of Father to child.
7. The kind are His children.
8. Prayer is anticipative.
9. Prayer is retrospective.
10. Prayer is cumulative.

Instructions.

BE
KIND.

Evelyn Hastings

She examined it slowly with wrinkling brows.

"I see you've said nothing in this about Christ and the Virgin Mary and all that. so I suppose you don't believe in it."

Evelyn looked distressed.

"Don't ask me about that. I would rather not discuss it. I was not there Anno Domini in Bethlehem. I know nothing. Anything may or may not be. No one can argue about religion or fight for it on intellectual grounds. It is a thing of the emotions, of instinctive beliefs. I have given you mine. It is the simplest form possible. I worry about nothing, ask for nothing, try to prove nothing. There is ~~my religion~~; it is enough for me. It fills my whole life. You can take it also if you think it will do for you; or you can keep the ordinary Church Protestantism, if ~~that~~ that appeals to you more."

Maud wavered. What had her ordinary Church Protestantism done for her? It

The Religion of

seemed nothing. She had always disliked Sunday morning with its tiresome hours in church, her prayer-book had always seemed a mass of words without meaning made up by men, her hasty repetition of the Lord's Prayer kneeling shivering by her bedside brought her no comfort. But this idea of an ever-present companion to whom you could talk as Evelyn did, who granted your prayers and would send you a lover and take away your freckles even, if you asked him long enough—there was something seductive in this to frail, selfish humanity. And Evelyn said if you were only kind you could have no sins. Was that right? It seemed right when she said so. Maud took up the little folded paper and said eagerly:

"I will take this and abide by it, and try to get God to come and visit me too, as He does you."

Evelyn took both her hands.

"What do you wish for most in the world?" she said.

Evelyn Hastings

"I want to be engaged," replied Maud, reddening, but speaking frankly, so much did Evelyn's eyes seem to draw her soul from her. "I am getting so old, nearly twenty-one, and I have never had a regular engagement like most girls."

"Pray, then, for that all day and all night with all your soul."

"But must not I pray to be made good?—I mean kind or anything, first, for God to make my heart pure or something like that?"

Evelyn smiled very sweetly and sadly.

"Communion with God, constant prayer will do that. Try and feel that He is in the room with you. Sit at His feet and talk to Him."

Maud leaned forward, and the girls kissed each

CHAPTER VII.

IT was Tuesday noon. A luncheon had been arranged in honour of Lady Hastings's daughter, and Evelyn, indescribably bored and wearied by the anticipation of it, sat before her glass watching her maid making her more and more unattractive each moment as she steadfastly proceeded in dressing her mistress's rich auburn hair in the latest style, as it happened, the most unbecoming one possible to Evelyn's face.

"Stanley, you are making me hideous," she observed listlessly.

"It is unfortunate that madam has not the latest style of face. It does not become this coiffure; but we can make madam's cheek-bones higher with a touch of rouge."

"I won't have any rouge," returned her

Religion of Evelyn Hastings

mistress with sudden energy and a flush of anger.

Stanley shrugged her shoulders imperceptibly and fastened the last pin into the monstrosity she had contrived to make out of the light, silken waves of hair entrusted to her. Evelyn rose from her chair, and the rest of her toilet was completed in silence.

When she came downstairs her mother glanced over her with satisfaction. Evelyn's face might be pale, her eyes heavy, and her heart sore, her husband might be absent and in hourly danger, but did not her gown fit and her hat look smart? was she not going to a luncheon at a house where princes dined? An appearance of grief was no doubt becoming and wise, but surely in her heart Evelyn must be very happy. So reasoned Lady Hastings.

Through the perfect greens of hothouse flowers on the luncheon-table, flowers which represented double the cost of the food upon it, Evelyn saw a line of faces without heeding

The Religion of

them; the women's for the most part were made up and painted until they seemed like mere masks such as one can buy for Guy Fawkes' day—pink-cheeked, staring-eyed, and grinning. The men's were dull and impassive, heavy and fish-eyed from over-feeding. Evelyn longed to be away. Beside her sat Count Slinisky, owner of a genuine title and immense estates in Poland. He was credited, too, with possessing that pleasing eccentricity, brains, and that was why Evelyn, also believed to have the same peculiarity, was seated next him.

Lady Hastings looked across at her and at the interested face of the Count and felt complacent.

"After all," she was thinking, "it doesn't so much matter a girl being clever if they don't object to it." The "they" in her mind referring to Society in general, but more particularly to people of title. She remembered that she herself, though never accused of anything so stupid and bourgeois

Evelyn Hastings

as cleverness, had not sat next anybody particular at her *début* luncheons, and she thought Evelyn must feel very happy.

Evelyn did not unduly exert herself to please Count Slinsky, but she pleased him all the same. Her unpainted cheek pleased him, and the unconscious charity of thought and feeling that she showed in all the conversations he led her into.

The luncheon was nearly over. The whole weary routine of eating things which don't suit one, of drinking things one doesn't like, hearing things one has heard before, and saying things one is not interested in, had been got through by the victims, and Evelyn was feeling cheerful at the near prospect of escape.

Lady Hastings was deep in conversation with Lady Craven, when a sudden wave of exclamations, caused her to start and look apprehensively across the table. To her horror and dismay she saw Evelyn holding her wrist, from which a miniature stream of blood was

The Religion of

pouring on to her hostess's white camask, and the Count leaning forward proffering his silk handkerchief to tie up the wound. Evelyn herself, however, took no notice of the cut nor the blood on the handkerchief. She was staring across the table in the direction of her mother, it is true, but with eyes that looked far past her, and were full of curious light. A second's silence fell on the table, every one was staring at her. Then Evelyn said suddenly, "He's wounded!"

A shiver went round the table. Every one knew that she was thinking of her absent husband. She was very inconsiderate. They all knew, of course, that men were fighting and dying and bleeding for them in the field, while they were feeding, gossiping, and laughing at home, but she should not remind them of it at luncheon.

Lady Hastings went white to her eyelashes with chagrin.

"Evelyn! Evelyn!" she said sharply. The

Evelyn Hastings

keen tone of displeasure recalled the girl to herself. She glanced hastily round the table, and coloured to find every eye full of wonder and consternation fixed on her; above all, her mother's white, angry face opposite showed her that she had seriously disturbed all these well-meaning people who were entertaining her. She took the whole matter in, in a moment, and with natural presence of mind forced a smile and added quickly:

"But not seriously, any more than I am!" and surrendered her hand to be bandaged by the Count, who was gazing at her sympathetically

Lady Hastings drew her breath again, relieved. Evelyn had saved the situation, and her smile was certainly lovely. But what a terrible person she was to take about with one! Why had she, the always correct Lady Hastings, been cursed with such an impossible daughter? The Count was absorbed in Evelyn's hand, and general conversation was resumed

The Religion of

with an effort among the other guests. A few moments later the hostess collected eyes and rose. Evelyn, who had been sitting back in her chair, pallid and motionless, did not rise with the rest. She had fainted.

Count Slinsky's physical strength was not usually his strong point, but he gathered enough on this occasion to carry Evelyn as far as the sofa, where the guests crowded round her in consternation. Windows were opened, the lace at her throat unfastened, smelling bottles were put beneath her nose, and glasses of cold water offered to sprinkle her forehead. She came to her senses very quickly, and sat up on the couch with an absent, disconcerted look. Count Slinsky and Lady Hastings remained beside her, and the latter after a few moments moved away to the window. The Count continued to look at her steadfastly. As has been said, these two possessed the common attribute of brains, and these call to each other across a crowd, when they find their like, as strongly as

Evelyn Hastings

hearts can do or physical affinities, only in different language.

Evelyn, pale, tremulous, unnerved, with shining, absent eyes, spoke to him after a moment in a quiet, natural voice. He had said nothing, but his silence was full of understanding.

"You know I had no reason to cut myself like that. The knife was in my hand, but I don't see how it happened. I feel sure Durham was wounded just then, and in the same place. I saw——" but she stopped short and looked at him. "All this seems absurd to you—it must. Don't let's talk any more of it."

"Do tell me; tell me all you saw in that moment when your spirit was so far away from me," he pressed, leaning forward eagerly; "I shall not ridicule it. I am not sceptical; tell me."

"Well, only that for a moment I seemed to catch a glimpse of something. A plain, very dark, only with a moon rising behind a hill of

The Religion of

jutting rock. It was all sharp shadow and white light, and a little body of horse were galloping over it, and then there was a flash and cry beside one of the rocks in shadow, and . . . and it all went away when mamma said 'Evelyn.'"

She paused again, and Count Slinsky did not speak, only continued to wait attentively. But Evelyn saw there was no derision, no incredulity; only the gravest interest in his face, and she continued simply—"There is nothing in it after all, nothing at all; only it startled me. I cut myself, and the idea of wounds and the sight of blood made me, of course, think of Cecil, and the brain called up a scene for the moment before me. It does that very easily with me. Sometimes a few words will bring a whole picture before me, words that I am sure would not tell much to other people."

"You are not telling the truth now," observed the Count calmly; "you are not

Evelyn Hastings

telling me what you really think, what your conviction is."

"Well, do you want to know it?" said Evelyn, suddenly bending forward and speaking very earnestly. "I think it is a message from God. I prayed I might know when Cecil was wounded. I have my answer now: he is wounded."

Count Slinsky nodded. "Just so: that's what I knew you thought."

"And you don't think so," Evelyn answered, smiling.

"I think nothing—because I know nothing," he returned gravely. "You may have the gift of second sight. There seems to be such a thing," and he gazed into her eyes seriously. The mental and religious life she led inwardly, far removed from the petty details of existence, had wonderfully spiritualised her face. The Count thought of the Yogis of India, and wondered how far the veil of flesh can be cast aside and the spirit set free from it, by the human will. He had studied the Yogis and the

The Religion of

marvellous religions of India, and they had taught him much.

Lady Hastings came up and carried Evelyn away before they had had any more conversation, and Evelyn went home absorbed in herself and quite silent.

That night she felt unusually wearied and tired, and went to bed early. A large fire burned in the grate at the foot of her bed, and she lay for a long time gazing at the lucent red thrown all over the room—a room the embodiment of luxurious comfort, from the deep velvet chairs glowing in the firelight to the voluminous curtains that shrouded the window. But the girl in her great silk-hung bed felt indescribably lonely and desolate, and the tears kept welling up to her eyes and falling noiselessly till they had soaked the pillow. Her wrist throbbed violently, and she altered the handkerchief several times without ceasing it. Then, as she felt sleep coming stealthily over her, her thoughts turned to prayer, and she prayed simply to the God

Evelyn Hastings

who was always near her, as one talks to a friend:

"I should like to know where he is, and whether the wound is serious. He was wounded to-day, was he not, in the wrist, and You let me feel the same? O God, thank you for that glimpse of him, and for my cut. Please tell me how he is, and oh save him, save him for me, and bring him back. Take me to him now in my dream, take me to him." Her eyes grew heavier, her lips ceased to move, she turned on one side, put her unwounded hand beneath her cheek, and fell asleep.

A great grey plain, misty and still in the early light, began to grow out of the pitchy void of black night before his eyes as Durham, with a groan, lifted his aching head and looked out. Since the setting of the moon behind the opposite ridge, the hours had passed over him heavily laden with pain and fever. There was a great gash in his wrist on which at last

The Religion of

the blood had blackened and grown dry, and his ankle was shot through and useless. He had been overlooked, forgotten, left behind; the dawn taught him this, as it showed him the deserted plain rolling away in quiet grey on every side. He closed his eyes again. There was nothing to see but the ledge of rock over him, under which he had crawled for shelter yesterday, and his loneliness, written between the sky and plain. His body foodless, nearly bloodless, nearly pulseless, felt nothing. Behind the curtain of his lids, the brain, filled with the strange fire of fever, seemed alight and glowing. It is strange how this fever which consumes and kills, lends to the brain a power which is semi-divine. Man is allowed to rise to the state of the gods, and as he touches it, he dies. Moments of extraordinary mental power are given to man when his temperature rises to the killing point.

Durham lived over again the five days with Evelyn, the rest of his life before and after

Evelyn Hastings

was blotted out. It was only those five days that were worth counting. With extraordinary minuteness and precision, the brain worked out again the whole picture of them, minute by minute, detail by detail. Evelyn was in his arms, again he had a strand of her light hair round his fingers; her tender eyes were on him. Then he heard her voice saying, "How you are wounded!" But in those days he had not been wounded. It was confused and yet so clear. Then it became still clearer: his eyelids flew open. Evelyn was there, her face was framed against the rock! He gave a great cry of joy, and then her lips were on his—he felt their softness and saw the gleam of her eyes near to his.

"How did you get here?" he asked confusedly

"I don't know," Evelyn answered. A joyous laugh rang out under the rock. "I am part of yourself—I am here because you are here, I suppose. If a woman gives you her body,

The Religion of

you can lose her; if she gives you her mind, you have her for ever."

"Dear Evelyn," he murmured, holding her with burning hands. He was weak now, and he held on to life by her strength.

"Give me your wrist, and let me suck that black blood away from it," she said, raising the wounded hand, and he felt her lips' pressure on it, while a strange comfort and delight ran through his shocked and battered frame. When she had cleared the blood from the wound, she bound it up with his handkerchief, and he watched her. It all seemed natural and yet unnatural, and he was too weak to reason.

"You are burnt up with fever," she said. "Have you no water with you; are you not dreadfully thirsty?"

"Yes; my things must be scattered round somewhere. Look for my flask and the water-bottle. I can live if I get some water."

Evelyn rose, laying his arm down on the

Evelyn Hastings

grass and stepped from under the rock. The sun was just rising in a golden flame over the edge of the plain. Great arches of rose-colour ribbed the sky. The breeze before the dawn swept softly up to meet her, bringing the scent of the dry, brown seeding-grass to her nostrils. She walked forward looking anxiously everywhere. In the grass on her left she noticed a hideous black patch, where the stems of the grass were broken and the heads stuck together with blood. She guessed it was where Durham had first fallen. She ran towards it and found his flask, his leather-covered water-bottle, and a little tin case that had dropped from his pocket. She carried them back to the rock and knelt down, unscrewing the bottle. "Drink," she said softly, slipping her arm beneath his head, and he drank with eager, burning lips. Then she turned to the little tin case and held it up to him with a laugh. It was the one she had given him packed with meat lozenges. And they

The Religion of

both laughed and exchanged a passionate kiss across the box as she opened it and slipped one into his mouth. "You have quite a little house here," she said, looking up at the great jutting slab of rock over their heads and into the recess behind them, where it sloped obliquely to the earth. "I shall put the water and the flask and the box at the back here in this natural sort of cupboard. You can reach them if you want them, when I am not here."

"I wish an ambulance-train would come along, there might be a chance then," Durham muttered; "but they're all ahead of us, I expect, with the fighters. They think they've done their work here. All the wounded are taken, aren't they, from here? you don't see any of our men left, do you?"

Evelyn scanned the plain round them, it was a sheet of golden grass waving gently towards them. Here and there the grass was broken and blackened. Hideous patches such as she

Evelyn Hastings

had just seen were there, but she saw nothing else.

"No; they have gone on," repeated Durham. "I don't believe they will come back, nor will any others come, I should think, now."

Evelyn, raising her eyes, saw a dark blot in the clear azure of the sky. It was a vulture. She saw it and shuddered, looking desperately at the loved face in the black shadow of the rock. "Let me go," she said suddenly, "and see if I can find any traces of life—any houses, any village, any settlement. Let me go!"

His hand held her firmly. "You might get lost," he whispered; "it is not safe for you. Stay with me, I want you here."

"I shall not lose my way, I will come back to you. Please let me go. Think, if we could find a house, how much safer you would be."

"It is all enemy's country," he murmured faintly.

"The enemy will not hurt me," she returned; "I will come back." She drew away from

The Religion of

n, and stood out in the sunlight. It fell
t on her face. All the land in front of her
stretched out level. Far farther than she could
walk, she could see; but behind her, behind
the rock, rose a sharp, stony ridge. There
might be something, some life, some hope
behind it. She turned and took a sort of
trail, beaten she knew not by what feet, up
the side of the ridge, and the little stones
clattered down the steep sides as she
ascended.

For hours and hours she walked on that
frail stony trail amongst the rocks. The
ridge that seemed so low and easy from the
rock, grew and grew ever upward as she
climbed, and when she reached the summit
it gave her no return. Ridge after ridge
rose round her; transverse valleys and gulleys
lay between. She saw how far the sun had
travelled round the sky. For her it was
useless to attempt to go farther. She had
gained nothing by coming, except that she

Evelyn Hastings

had seen their loneliness face to face; but for Evelyn, loneliness after all was only loneliness shared with God. "He will take care of us even here," she thought, as mechanically her feet followed the trail retracing her steps to the rock where Durham lay. The shadows were long amongst the rocks when she reached him, and fell with a little sob of gladness and fatigue into his arms. "I could see nothing," she murmured; "tomorrow I ~~must~~ go again in a different direction."

It was growing dusk, too dark to see; the outlines of her face grew fainter and fainter, and at last the light patch her fair hair made against the black rock disappeared. He spoke, but there was no answer; he stretched out his arms, there was nothing there.

"Only a dream," Durham muttered, turning stiffly on his side; "only a dream. O God! the dream before death. Still, I am thankful for it—I have seen her again," and the curtain

The Religion of

of black came down on the plain, and there was no more sound under the rock. . . .

At the same time Lady Hastings was breakfasting alone in Grosvenor Gardens, and ruminating sadly on her daughter's shortcomings, and the disgraceful scene at the luncheon yesterday.

The fact, however, that it was Count Slinsky's handkerchief, with his monogram embroidered thereon in gold silk, that bound her daughter's wrist, comforted her not a little; and when, before she had finished her coffee, a note of the most interesting inquiry, accompanied by a huge bouquet of white blossoms, arrived from the same distinguished personage, she began to feel considerably softened towards Evelyn. While gazing at the bouquet and reading the note, which breathed sincere, even reverential admiration, evidently excited by yesterday's incident, a new light broke in suddenly upon her

Evelyn Hastings

Perhaps, indeed, Evelyn was not wholly the unsophisticated and intolerably foolish child she seemed, perhaps the scene she had so disliked had not been brought about by that ridiculous devotion to her absent husband after all; but, on the contrary, it was a little entertainment for the express benefit of the Count, a trifling scheme of her dear, clever daughter to secure his attention and interest, in which she had obviously completely succeeded. The more Lady Hastings revolved this theory in her mind, the more she convinced herself it was true, and as she considered her child in this far more amiable and lovable character, remorse seized her for having so misjudged her.

"Of course, that was it," she said with a smile, sniffing delicately at the stephanotis and tuberose; "a very clever little scheme, dear child."

She was so pleased at this discovery that, having finished her breakfast, she took the

The Religion of

bouquet in her hand and went up herself to her daughter's room. Evelyn, on account of her fainting yesterday, had been recommended to take a long rest, and to have her breakfast upstairs. Lady Hastings knocked at the door, and hearing no answer went in. She saw the breakfast standing untouched on a table by the bed, and the girl herself lying there so motionless that her mother thought her asleep. She went close to the bed, however, to make sure, and was surprised to find her eyes wide open, full of light and interest, and a very happy, satisfied expression on her pale face. She did not look in the least like one just awakened, but rather like one who has been hearing or seeing something vitally interesting, and had their attention fixed on it for a long time. Her hand with the great diagonal cut on the wrist lay on the quilt, exposed with the handkerchief unbound; she had apparently been examining it.

Evelyn Hastings

Even Lady Hastings, somewhat obtuse as she might be to anything so uninteresting as expression, could not fail to be startled.

"Evelyn!" she exclaimed.

The girl turned and looked at her. She made an evident effort to withdraw her eyes from some long mental perspective they had been scanning, and force them to include her mother in their focus.

"Is anything the matter?" inquired the latter anxiously. Intense feeling in any form, even joy, always suggested to Lady Hastings that something must be the matter with the subject.

"No! no! nothing," Evelyn exclaimed, springing up into a sitting position. "Only I have had the most lovely dreams—so real."

Lady Hastings looked at her indulgently. She really made a very sweet picture with the collar of her gown open on her neck, and her Niagara of bright hair on her shoulders. Lady Hastings thought that she

The Religion of

guessed perfectly the nature of those dreams. "Well, I have brought you a pleasant reality in exchange," she said, smiling, and put the flowers into Evelyn's hand.

Evelyn looked at them and smelt them delightedly, simply because she was in a delighted frame of mind. Her heart was singing within her. She was happy, wildly happy, as Joan of Arc must have been on her grassy hills, after her first visions; happy as the artist when he feels the divine afflatus upon him; happy with the triumphant ecstasy of all humanity when it feels through the encircling darkness the finger-tips of its God stretched out to touch and bless. Had she not received a divine favour? Never had she felt so much the favoured child, and so near her Father. She gazed at her mother, and for a moment longed to open her heart to her, but Lady Hastings's face was like a blank wall in which there is no door through to the mind.

Evelyn Hastings

She said nothing, except "Thank you, mamma. How kind of the Count."

"I am so glad to find you so much better," pursued Lady Hastings. "You quite frightened me yesterday. You will take some breakfast now, I hope, and then dress and come down. I think you should send a little note to the Count yourself, he is evidently quite anxious about you."

"I will, mamma," Evelyn answered readily; and after her mother had gone downstairs again, she poured out her tea and swallowed it hastily, and ate her breakfast hungrily after the work and the fresh air of the night. Then she got up with a bound, and walked about the room collecting her garments and singing. The maid heard her, and came in to her duties. With quicker perception than Lady Hastings, she ignored the bouquet left upon the bed, and after repressing her curiosity for some time she ventured:

The Religion of

"Madam is very gay this morning; has Madam heard of Monsieur?"

"Yes—that is, no. Oh, there! leave my hair; I'll twist it up. You are pulling me."

• Then, with her face in a flood of colour she sent the maid out of the room that she might sing at her ease. Her husband's kiss was still on her lips; she felt the pressure of his arms. He was alive, and she was going to him again that night. How wonderful it all was, and yet how simple. She had prayed for this, and God had answered her prayer; as a thousand times before her prayers had been answered. Always, always, in fact, sooner or later, sometimes in the letter, sometimes in the spirit, sometimes in both.

"But why? what have I done to deserve it?" she thought wonderingly, sitting on the floor putting on her shoes and stockings. "Is it only because I believe so thoroughly He will?" and she thought of the woman in

Evelyn Hastings

Scripture to whom it was said, "Thy belief has made thee whole."

"But why is belief such a virtue? Surely the Deity is not like a human being to be flattered by it? With me it is no virtue; it can't be. It is only a blind instinct. I give it up. I understand nothing about it, but I am awfully happy. Perhaps in some way belief is necessary to the Deity before he can help us; perhaps that's why it is so insisted on in the New Testament," and Evelyn sat long on the floor absorbed and marvelling.

For the following week she seemed transformed; her face bloomed like a flower. She appeared beside her mother everywhere in the day-time, and the difference between this creature, laughing and shining-eyed, from the pallid, listless Evelyn they had known, electrified her acquaintance. She accepted everything that her mother suggested, instead of formerly refusing the larger half of her invita-

The Religion of

tions; but it was noticeable she never accepted a late evening engagement.

"I feel so much better when I go to bed early," she pleaded, which was perfectly true. Lady Hastings, delighted with the new daughter she had acquired, willingly acceded to her retiring early.

Evelyn, in fact, lived now only for the hours of emancipation that came with the darkness. The events of the day touched and interested her not at all, but out of her own stock of overflowing happiness she longed to confer some on all about her, so that she lent herself to her mother's every wish through the day, and waited with a devouring impatience for the moment when she could fling herself on her bed.

Not one night was she disappointed. Her eyes, that closed in the Grosvenor Gardens bedroom, opened under the bright sky and looked out over the baked grass and broken rock of the plain. Night after night she sat

Evelyn Hastings

beneath the ledge of the rock and held Durham's hand against her breast and saw him, touched him, felt the pulse of his life. She absorbed his presence as flowers absorb the sunlight, and woke morning after morning refreshed and strengthened for the treadmill of days. His wound in the wrist healed, and so did hers. By the seventh day, hers was only a red seam, and his opened no longer. She washed off the sticking-plaster and did not replace it, and came downstairs, her eyes suffused and absent, full of the scene of the night. She came into the breakfast-room, and Lady Hastings rose and walked towards her with a strange expression in her face.

"Dear Evelyn, I have sad news for you this morning," she said gently, taking one of the slim hands in hers.

Evelyn coming down, elated, joyous, confident from her prayers and dreams, was as one girt about with armour. Moreover, she knew from long experience that what was serious

The Religion of

news to her mother was not of necessity serious news to herself.

She raised her smiling face and answered brightly, "What is it, mamma? Has Madame Kate spoiled my gown, after all?"

Lady Hastings shook her head and turned away. "I wish it were only that," she murmured.

Evelyn's face set, and she glanced over the breakfast-table and saw the open paper. "Ah," she said simply. But she did not go to the paper. She had just come from what seemed to her most trustworthy sources of information. "Tell me what you have heard," she said merely, with an accent on the "you."

"Dear child, what I have feared every day has happened at last. Durham's name is in the paper. He was wounded as you thought, and is now—dead."

Evelyn's face changed suddenly to snow-white, then grey, then crimson. It was not that she believed the word, it was simply the

Evelyn Hastings

shock living human nature feels when that word is coupled even momentarily, even in jest, with a name we love. It is the terrible prescience that if not now true, it must inevitably be true one day.

Then her lips set slightly, and she answered calmly, "It is a mistake."

Lady Hastings looked at her pityingly, also a little curiously. There was a ring of conviction in the voice that astonished her. Had Evelyn heard some later news? It was impossible. "Why do you think it a mistake?" she said gently.

"Because I have been . . . because——" began Evelyn, and then stopped short. She was proud of her beliefs, not ashamed of them, but she could not bear to bring them forward just then, to be made a jest of.

As she stopped and hesitated, Lady Hastings shook her head again and turned away in silence.

"Because I have prayed, and I believe God

The Religion of

answers prayer," she said resolutely, after a moment.

"Look at this," returned Lady Hastings, suddenly becoming stern. She unfolded the paper fully and spread it open on the table. The "list of killed" filled an entire column.

"Do you think these have not been prayed for? or are all these 'mistakes' too?"

Evelyn stared with widely-opened eyes at the paper. Then she sank suddenly on a chair and laid her arms on the table, and her head on them, sobbing bitterly.

Her mother sat down beside her in silence, and put her arm round her. "Whenever Evelyn is thoroughly natural I love her," Lady Hastings had been heard to say, and it was truer than most things the lady said:

Yet Evelyn was not crying for herself. Her tears flowed simply from an agony of sympathy, not uncommon to her, for those who like herself had prayed, and as it seemed in vain; for those less fortunate than she. Her belief

Evelyn Hastings

made her invulnerable. But she did not say this, and Lady Hastings rejoiced in finding her thoroughly natural.

"Hush, dear," she said presently, as Evelyn continued to cry bitterly. "We must learn to accept these things and resign ourselves. We are all in the hands of Providence, and it is His will," she added piously.

Evelyn suddenly raised her head at this, and dried her eyes. She looked at her mother steadily. A conflict, she felt, was approaching, and she dreaded it. She sat silent, gazing at her with reddened lids. Lady Hastings brought up the attack herself with her next words:

"I will see to all your mourning," she said gently, fancying she was showing herself wonderfully thoughtful, delicate, and considerate. "You will be too . . . too upset to attend to it."

Evelyn looked desperately round the room. "But, mamma, I can't wear mourning for one

The Religion of

whom I don't believe to be dead. I can't—don't ask me."

Lady Hastings stared at her in return with cockled brows. She turned over this remarkable phrase in her mind for several seconds, gazing at Evelyn apprehensively. Then her brow cleared. She piqued herself on her subtlety in reading her daughter's mind completely, as she answered soothingly:

"But really, Evelyn, black is most becoming to you, I assure you; your pale skin and fair hair are only thrown up by it. I don't think you need mind."

She stopped short, for Evelyn had risen, and stood now with her hands pressed violently over her eyes.

"Don't, don't!" she said, as if in pain. "It is not that at all. How can I make you understand?" She took two or three steps up and down the room, then came up to her mother and fell upon her knees by her side.

Lady Hastings looked frightened. The girl

Evelyn Hastings

was swayed apparently by intense feeling, and to Lady Hastings intense feelings were always indecorous and alarming.

"Don't you see," she said in a low tone, grasping one of her mother's wrists, "that for me to wear mourning is to parade distrust of God, of my own prayers, a distrust I don't feel? I am absolutely certain that Cecil is alive. Every one of my prayers hitherto has been answered. Why should I distrust God now, because I see a few printed lines in the paper? If he had sent the conviction into my heart that for some good reason He had not heard me this time, I would believe; not otherwise."

"Conviction into your heart!" repeated Lady Hastings, with scorn. "Evelyn, you are mad; you don't know what you are saying. Miracles are not worked any longer. This shock has been too much for you. I shall order the mourning, and you will wear it. What would people say if you did not?"

"What they pleased!" replied Evelyn

The Religion of

vehemently. "Is every feeling one has, every sentiment, every belief, even one's religion, to be sacrificed in this horrible life to what people may say?"

"Yes, of course!" returned Lady Hastings with equal vehemence. "Isn't that what we all live for? Sentiment! belief! religion!—what good would they be if you were turned out of Society?"

Evelyn stood up. Her arms hung straight at her sides; on her face was the look of the exhausted swimmer after he has given up his last struggle. In her mind was forming the great query: "What does it matter what you say, do, or are amongst these people? You would take no account of the rocks and stones of the desert; these people understand you, as little. What does it matter if you do go about amongst them in false colours?"

"Order the mourning and I will wear it," she said mechanically, moving away to the fireplace.

Evelyn Hastings

Lady Hastings rose smilingly. She wisely said nothing. What she was thinking was: "Poor, dear Evelyn could not stand that last idea. It quite unnerved her. She gave in at once;" and she reflected with pride on the skilful way she had conducted her side of the discussion.

The next afternoon Count Slinsky called, and was shown to the drawing-room, where Evelyn was sitting—a truly dismal figure—under the full weight of the blackest mourning that Lady Hastings could procure for her.

When she turned her face to him, however, he saw she was smiling, and her eyes were lustrous—not from tears. The contrast between the advertisement of grief in her attire and the advertisement of composure in her face confused him. His heart beat quickly, and his brain supplied him with impossible suggestions which his instinct told him were false. He held out his hand.

The Religion of

"What news have you?" he asked in a tone suited to her face, not her attire.

A friendship had been established between these two which the Count would not have relinquished for anything except one thing in this world. He was a man of great and inquiring intellect, and Evelyn presented a study to him. He spoke about her little, and thought about her much. He studied and watched this curious psychological life that was shown to him through her transparent personality, as the eager naturalist watches physical life through the sides of a glass-case.

Thanks to his delicacy, his sympathy, his earnestness, Evelyn had laid aside all mask, all disguise with him. The conventionality, ~~the~~ commonplaceness, the "naturalness" that Lady Hastings so commended, all these things so foreign to her own nature but which she assumed at her mother's commands, were dropped before him with an immense relief. She met him with a quiet trustfulness, and a

Evelyn Hastings

perfect confidence from which she found she drew an immense strength. She was herself while with him, and talked of what pleased her and revealed her thoughts without apprehension.

"Well," she answered, "come and sit down, and I will tell you." She went back to her corner of the sofa, and drew up beside it a little wicker arm-chair for him.

"I had a tiring night last night, I had to walk so much farther than usual. When I reached the stone ledge I found it empty. It was quite dark and very hot. I sat down and waited, wondering what had happened, and what was best for me to do."

She paused suddenly and looked at Slinisky without access of everydayism upon her, but seeing nothing but serious interest in his face, she drifted on happily on the current of her thoughts.

"I waited till the sky began to lighten and grow grey, and then I saw not very far from

The Religion of

me a rough pony cropping at a little dry grass between the stones. I was guided to get up and go over to him. He had a tame look, as if he lived close by, don't you know; it was not a wild horse by any means. I vaulted up on to his back by means of his mane, and held on by it, and he cantered gently off. As I thought, he took me home. Just as it was light enough to see things indistinctly, he turned into an enclosure round a farmhouse, and came to a standstill. I slipped off his back and went up to the house, a sort of low, dirty-looking little farmhouse. The door was shut, but one window at the side was open. I clambered through and made my way across the room; it was almost dark inside. Then I heard Cecil's voice calling me, and I made out a little, low cot-bed in one corner. Cecil was lying there, and I was so glad to find him again that I threw myself down beside him and cried."

Evelyn Hastings

Slinsky smiled.

"Well, what did he say?"

"Oh, he told me the boy ~~at~~ the house had been out on his pony, and saw him lying under the rock. The boy came up to him out of curiosity, and finding him alive, he had got his people to come and carry Cecil home, where they had done all they could for him, and promised him shelter and food till he was well. He said they seemed poor, but were very charitable and quite sympathetic to him. That was all there was time for. I fell asleep beside him and woke up here, but I shall see him again to-night," she concluded.

"When I saw the paper yesterday morning I was afraid to come," Slinsky said after a minute. "But I felt I could not stay away longer; I felt I must ~~try~~ at any rate to see you to-day."

"Yes? Of course the papers make no difference to me. And equally of course mamma believes everything in them. She

The Religion of

made me wear this mourning! I do so hate it! It depresses me dreadfully in spite of myself; and then it seems so utterly monstrous, when I see him every night."

"And you never mention any of this to her?"

"Never," Evelyn answered decisively. "She thinks me semi-lunatic as it is. She would think me fit for immediate incarceration, if I told her any of this."

"You speak of it to no one else?"

"Nobody but you," returned Evelyn simply.

"I am grateful," Slinsky answered, and pressed her hand fervently.

Lady Hastings entered at that moment, and seeing the action, the attitude of both, the expression on their faces, the warm *entente* in their eyes, she paused amazed on the threshold. Her heart beat rapidly with pleasure. Nothing could have pleased her better—except, perhaps, a marriage with Lord Strathmore—than a marriage with Count Slinsky. At the same

Evelyn Hastings

time, astonishment held the uppermost place in her mind, mingled with acutest admiration. Here was her daughter only yesterday relieved of her husband and to-day sitting smiling, bright and happy, apparently without a care, bent on new conquests. In her mourning, too. Lady Hastings felt a little shocked. Extravagant sentiment was, of course, unnecessary; but a little conventional sadness and a few damp handkerchiefs would have gone so well with all that silk crape. She would not intrude then, but she would talk to Evelyn quietly a little later.

Her eyelids still widely stretched open with the surprise of it all, Lady Hastings silently withdrew.

For the next few days, Evelyn was overwhelmed with letters and notes of condolence, and, which were still worse, with visits. There was no escape for her. Lady Hastings personally supervised the whole dreary business of "consolation," so afraid was she that Evelyn

The Religion of

might not seem to mourn in the conventional, received manner. She was not allowed to go to her own little rooms, but Lady Hastings kept her in the large drawing-room all the afternoon, every day to receive her callers. The visits so jarred upon Evelyn and worried her, that she looked abjectly miserable enough while they lasted, and her friends went away pleased and satisfied, having assured themselves that she looked wretchedly ill and had quite lost her good looks. Save for her continued prayers for serenity and self-control which were granted her, Evelyn felt that she could not have borne that fortnight after Durham's death had been announced in the papers; but there was the blessed, blessed night to look forward to, and the consciousness all day of the great Hand round her.

Maud Stevens came with the rest. She was dashingy dressed, but had her freckles and was still unengaged. She sat down close by Evelyn, ran her eyes keenly over the

Evelyn Hastings

mourning, and pulled her face into an expression of aggressive sympathy.

"I am so sorry for you, Evelyn, really so sorry. But you would believe in your prayers, and now you see—just what I told you!"

"I have seen nothing yet," replied Evelyn coldly, "but a few lines in the daily paper to the effect that Captain C. Durham is dead. You may be surprised to hear that I do not believe everything I see in the paper."

"Then don't you believe Durham is dead?"

"Certainly not," replied Evelyn steadily, in spite of the frowning signals of her mother's face opposite her.

"Why not?"

"Because it would be against the experience of my whole life, which has been that nothing I have prayed for has been refused, and it would be distrusting my greatest Friend, the only real Friend I have." She looked into the shallow, spiteful, envious eyes of the other girl with a serious, cold dignity.

The Religion of

"What do you wear mourning for, then?" she asked rudely. "I wouldn't, if it wasn't necessary."

"To please mamma," answered Evelyn.

"Lady Hastings is foolishly credulous of the papers, then, I suppose?" sneered Maud. "Well, Evelyn, you may have your bible back. I have been praying ever since I had it, and I find it's no use. It's just as I thought, it does not work. You'll find your husband is dead, and then you won't believe quite so much."

"You are *not* kind," said Evelyn, in a low voice, her eyes full of involuntary tears. "There is only one injunction in the book, but you disobey it."

Maud looked both indignant and uncomfortable. She had felt kind and sympathetic when she came. She was so pleased at the news that Evelyn was a widow, and to think that after all she had only had five days of happiness. But now to find her not so very unhappy, and perhaps

Evelyn Hastings

too, as she said, not a widow, was so unpleasant and disconcerting.

"I wasn't born kind, I suppose," she remarked gloomily, after a minute. "You can't help how you are born."

"You can't blame God for liking some of his children better than others, just as human fathers do," replied Evelyn with some spirit, in defence of her religion, though her voice was thick with tears.

"Well, why didn't he make me as he wanted me?" Maud retorted aggressively.

"He may have no more power over that than human fathers have," answered Evelyn. "And how do you know that the God who made you is the one I pray to? I believe there are certainly two—one evil and one good. Perhaps there are a great many more."

Maud looked dismayed and confused. A young lieutenant pushed his way up to Evelyn's side and secured her attention. Maud sat on

Religion of Evelyn Hastings

her chair, humped up with envy and all her religion forgotten.

Evelyn introduced the new-comer after a moment, and glided away to another part of the room. Maud became all smiles, and tried hard to fascinate the young officer, in which she partly succeeded.

Driving away in her hansom after her visit, she stared gloomily at herself in the little glass at the side.

"Evelyn is kind," she thought to herself. "The question is: can one help that, or is one born that way?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE winter was wearing away and the days lengthening, and Evelyn watched them do so with delight. All her previous summers she had been pent up in school. In this one she would be free, married. Then, if Durham came back, what a summer they would have together! She had a box of flowers before her bedroom window, and in this one day she planted a root of March primroses she had surreptitiously bought for a penny in the street. The primroses grew and flourished, and Evelyn spent many happy hours by them in quiet thought. Her mind had a new plane to travel on just now. She could not settle a question with herself; she thought, she doubted, she hoped and feared by turns. Now and then a flood of colour would sweep over her face and her eyes would grow radiant,

The Religion of

resting assently on the delicate unfolding buds, that opened so courageously and confidingly to the still black and wintry skies.

One morning they were blue and the air was soft. The sun shone in at the window and fell round the girl like a warm mantle. The plant was one great cushion of opening flowers. Evelyn's eyes had been fixed on the pale yellow petals; suddenly her lids expanded widely. An expression of joy that was almost terror covered her face. She sprang to her feet with a little cry, instantly suppressed. To herself, she always seemed as one camped amongst enemies. Standing in the sunlight, her face was glorified by joy. She felt within her own the strange stirring of another life. For a moment her heart beat flutteringly, a sickness like the sickness of fear came over her; then she bent over the flowers and kissed them, feeling as if she were kissing the hands of God, in thankfulness and gratitude. She was sure now; the question was settled.

Evelyn Hastings

When she went down to the drawing-room she found her mother alone. A post had just come in and she was seated by a little table near the fire with the letters by her. It seemed to Evelyn a quiet, propitious moment for imparting her secret. She so seldom saw her mother alone. She took a chair on the opposite side of the fire and sat down in silence, wondering what she should say. Her mother seemed so far, so very far away from her.

"Mamma, I am expecting to——" she stopped short.

"What, my love?" asked Lady Hastings, blandly examining the superscription of her various letters.

"To—to—be a mother when he comes back." Her face had flushed crimson, her words were almost inaudible. It had been a great effort to her to speak them, but now that it was done she raised her head again, almost joyfully, and looked for her mother's smile of pleasure and

The Religion of

Lady Hastings's face, however, wore no smile, only a look of dismayed annoyance.

"Really, Evelyn," she said sharply, "I can't think how you can bring yourself to speak of such things in that sudden and abrupt way. It's—it's indelicate."

Evelyn flushed painfully, then paled again, and sank back in her chair abashed.

"I thought you were going to say expecting to hear from Count Slinzky."

Evelyn was silent, and her silence seemed to irritate Lady Hastings, as indeed anything would have done just then. Here was her daughter, youthful, attractive, but still a widow, on the point of being proposed to by a wealthy—really a very wealthy—Count, who apparently did not object to widows; but Heaven knows how he might object to mothers. Yet this distracting girl broke this unpleasant news to her like this! The match might never come off now; and yet she seemed to glory in it!

"How you can feel so much delight as

Evelyn Hastings

you appear to do in the prospective birth of a posthumous child," she pursued acidly, "I must confess escapes me."

"Posthumous!" repeated Evelyn, blanching to her lips.

"Yes," replied Lady Hastings, vehemently. "But now, Evelyn, let us put an end to this nonsense once for all. Durham is dead, and you *are* a widow. Your delusions are ridiculous. You are fitting yourself for a madhouse. I have to a certain extent encouraged you in, or rather tolerated, your absurd notion, as it preserved your looks and prevented you spoiling your face with tears; but I can have it no longer. As to this other matter, that is a delusion too, most probably. Do you understand? In any case I won't have it mentioned to any one. Your—your absence of reserve positively pains me."

Evelyn sat motionless in her chair, gazing at her mother, with her colour coming and going in uneven patches.

The Religion of

"Delusions!" she murmured. "No, I don't think so. He can't be dead. I know he is not. I have prayed so."

"Prayed!" ejaculated Lady Hastings, her eyes sparkling with wrath, and showing a scorn incompatible with her reputed religious character and church-twice-a-day-on-Ash-Wednesday principles. "Then do you suppose praying will bring him back? If prayers really meant anything, do you think people would suffer as they do? Do you suppose thousands of others are not also praying for their lovers and sons and husbands to come back to them? If they were all answered, would there be any casualty lists?"

"They don't pray as I do perhaps," replied Evelyn, with pale lips and almost inaudibly; "and God has always been specially good to me."

Lady Hastings's lips paled too, but with anger.

"I won't listen to such ridiculous nonsense,"

Evelyn Hastings

she said; "I will not have you say such ridiculous things. People will bruit it about that you have become a lunatic. If you hold those opinions about prayer and those preposterous and wicked beliefs, please don't express them. I never heard such rubbish."

Evelyn leaned back in her chair with her eyes smarting, as tears came crowding up and burned them. Oh, how lonely, how desolate, how utterly alone she felt at that moment! If he would only come back, who understood her so well. However, one thought wrote itself into the darkness of her brain. She would doubtless see him to-night, and be able to tell him the great secret. Her tears dried on the burned lids. What did it matter what her mother said? This day-life of hers, this life of her body was really nothing. Her life lay there, reserved for her by the special favour of God in the heart of the darkness. The conditions of ordinary life were reversed in her favour. An ordinary individual, if he is leading a happy

The Religion of

daily life, should not complain if his nights are wearied with tedious and foolish dreams. And she, who lived the night with happy energy, must not complain if the day dragged along over her like a nightmare.

"I thought I ought to mention it," she said, after a minute, passing her handkerchief across her eyes; "but I shall not allude to it again."

After sitting a minute or two in silence, while Lady Hastings appeared engrossed in her correspondence, Evelyn slipped away and reached her little blue sitting-room. A bright fire sparkled in the grate, and Evelyn threw herself into an arm-chair by it and gave herself up to reflection. Within herself she was very happy. So far as her dreams guided her, Durham was improving steadily: his wounds were healing. Their separation would not be for much longer, and into her own life the new joy had come. To have a child, a being of her very own, to whom she could teach this

Evelyn Hastings

personal religion of hers that no one about her understood or cared for! The sex of the child mattered nothing to her; it would be a being whose heart she could turn into a temple of constant prayer, as her own had been.

"I shall never teach it to kneel saying long strings of words it does not understand," she mused; "that is no use. Nor take it to church to spend its time kicking its feet against the pews, and wishing it were away. It shall have Heaven within itself, and live with God from the first."

The red coals sank in the heart of the fire, and to Evelyn's dreaming eyes a glowing cinder shaped like a cathedral with numerous spires stood out alone in a gold cavern.

"Perhaps if all the churches were razed to the ground, and all outward forms of religion suppressed," she thought, "humanity would learn to understand God and His worship better. Humanity is naturally religious; it is always striving after religion, and then puts out

The Religion of

all its energy in the building of temples and in ceremonies. That satisfies it, and it craves no more. If all that were prevented, and the outlet, through which its enthusiasm leaks away, stopped; perhaps the fervour would glow more in the heart. "I would raze the churches," she thought, and struck at the coals with the poker, so that the cathedral tottered and fell into fragments, and a gas-jet of flame leaped out of the ruins.

The life she was living now interested Evelyn profoundly. She did not understand it. She wondered about her dreams and pondered over them. Were they simple dreams sent to her as a consolation merely, or were they visions, actual visions of what was happening to Durham? Did he dream the same dream at the same time? Did their minds really meet in some mysterious way, or was it only that her brain supplied her night by night with vivid pictures? She would know when he came back; she would ask him about the ledge under

Evelyn Hastings

the rock, and the plain, and the house where she had seen him lying on the small iron bed. She would know then. For the present she accepted them thankfully, only a little nervous now and then in spite of herself, lest the chain of them should be broken.

The day passed in a state of feverish expectation. It dragged along slowly to her, and the hours seemed to go on for ever. Lady Hastings was going to a quiet dinner, to which Evelyn had also been invited. Evelyn had positively refused, and the moment her mother had left she rushed up the stairs with her heart beating and gained her own room.

"No dinner for me to-night, Stanley; I am going to bed," she called through the door when her maid tapped at it. She would not even open it, so averse was she to wound her eyes and distract her mind with the sight of these people amongst whom she lived, and who really had become to her as the savages of the bush are to the white man thrown among them,

The Religion of

so far did they seem to stand from her mental and emotional life.

It was barely half-past seven, and tearing off her mourning, which never had any gentle treatment at her hands, she extinguished all the lights, and then in the grateful darkness flung herself on the bed, awaiting. She was quivering with emotion, and from end to end of her body beat the pulses, like a series of little hammers, jolting the flesh. With wide open eyes she stared into the darkness, besieged with the idea that she would not perhaps after all be able to sleep.

"Make me sleep," she murmured through clenched teeth. "O God, you *must*."

It was her usual form of prayer, and with her it was less a profane idea of compelling the Deity than an excess of passionate belief in its power.

A minute after, the sensation of the bed and the horizontal position rushed away from her, bright morning light from an opalescent sky

Evelyn Hastings

was round her, and a fresh morning breeze swept up to her face.

She looked round and found herself in the familiar place, just inside the enclosure this time, and with the dry, ragged grass brushing her ankles.

"I wonder why it is I am taken farther sometimes than others," she thought, "but so it is." She glanced over the house, which had patches of sun now on its face, and then went round to the side-window. It was open. She put her hands on the ledge, raised herself on to it, and then dropped into the room. Just as she did so, the door at the opposite end opened and startled her. She shrank back motionless behind a little strip of white curtain and waited. She felt a wild throb of jealousy as a girl entered, a girl in a short cotton frock and a twist of lightish hair on her shoulders. She was holding in her hands a small tray of some beaten red metal, and Evelyn saw her go up to the bed and rest it on a wooden stool beside the

The Religion of

foot-rail. Durham raised himself, and Evelyn saw that he looked over the girl's head, searching eagerly for her own face in the dusky twilight of the room. Evelyn looked round the curtain and smiled at him. She saw a flame leap suddenly into his dark eyes, and she drew back again and watched him with her heart throbbing.

The light-haired girl shuffled about the bed for a few seconds, and Evelyn heard her loose list slippers scrape on the matting, then she went out, and the slippers passed shuffling away into the distance of the house.

As the door closed, Evelyn rushed across the room and threw herself into Durham's outstretched arms. With their lips on each other's they lay for a few seconds in a passionate embrace, in which Evelyn felt every pain, chagrin, and sorrow was melted away.

Passion takes different forms in every human breast, according to the different elements it

Evelyn Hastings

finds there to fuse itself with. In some it is a flame that burns, in others a knife that cuts; with Evelyn, pure, exalted, emotional, it was a soothing balm that suffused itself through her, healing, curing, refreshing, compensating, smoothing out every dent and crack and bruise, of care and pain, it found in the white surface of her mind.

She lay there in his arms in a trance of still happiness, feeling his warm, strong heart beating under hers, and tears of sheer content forced themselves through her lids and fell upon his neck.

"You are nearly well, aren't you?" she whispered in his ear. "You must come back soon;" and then in a burning rush of words she told him her news, and the flood of joy swept over and engulfed them both.

"Do come back, come back and be with me at the time. I can't do without you. Please come."

Durham folded his arms round her.

The Religion of

"I am well. I was standing yesterday. I promise I will get to you in time."

The next moment she was again lying in her bed in her own home, and she opened her eyes on the familiar surroundings, feeling a sort of shock and physical faintness.

It was the same sensation as one feels when, after having been tightly bound by a cord to some object at a distance, the cord is suddenly severed and one falls, deprived of the support of the tension. She knew suddenly in a moment of desolating realisation that her twin life was over, that she would be free to come and go on the wings of the darkness no longer. That now she would have to wait, pray, hope, and believe patiently in the darkness like all other human beings. For that one moment it seemed as if she must have offended against her Friend, and that she was cut off from the divine favours she had known, as a punishment. She felt overwhelmed, and turned to hide her face in her pillow from the growing daylight peering

Evelyn Hastings

inquisitively into the room, while streaming tears rushed from her closed eyes. Life became black suddenly, like the desert when the dust storm sweeps up from the East, and lying there, almost fainting and weeping, she called wildly to herself;

“What have I done? Why is He angry?” Then suddenly the storm passed over, she grew calm, and in the stillness of her room a little whisper seemed to come to her. “You know where he is, that he lives, that he is coming home. You have no need now to see him so constantly, you have other consolations.”

Evelyn opened her eyes and gazed into the growing radiance of the day, and remembered suddenly her child. Then she laughed and dried her eyes, and felt the sunshine stealing into her heart.

“Of course,” she murmured to herself, “I must be content now to be brave and patient, and to wait.”

A month slipped by of lonely waiting, in

The Religion of

which the girl buried herself more and more in continual prayers. The nights brought her simply rest now--dull, heavy rest without a gleam of light in it.

• Then she had one more dream. A dream full of flashing light and movement. She stood upon a quay, the sunlight round her leapt from object to object, from the vessels to the sparkling surface of the water and back again like flame. The heat was intense. A swaying, lurching crowd pressed round her. She seemed to have no powers of speech or movement, only of vision. Passengers were hurrying from the dock on to the vessel alongside, and in the blaze of the sunshine she read the glittering letters of the name upon its hull. Then close to her a figure passed, hobbling, by with crutches on to the gangway, and as he turned his head she saw the face of Durham. The strong, dark beauty of it stood out against a background of pale blue and fiery gold. She rushed forward with outstretched arms, swept

Evelyn Hastings

by the flood of longing, and even as she did so the whole vision melted away and the dark hangings of her bed replaced it. She was awake and sprang up. The name she had read on the ship was before her everywhere. That was the boat which was bringing him home. She had seen him go on to it. She would watch for the arrival of that boat.

She threw open her windows to the dark, quiet night, and gazed up at the lowering, cloudy, troubled sky. But to Evelyn it was all glorified, all light. Behind that cloud curtain was One who heard and answered.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN she awoke one morning in the late spring, it was to a state of the keenest excitement. As far as she could calculate, it was this day on which would be the meeting. If all were really as she profoundly believed it was, then this was the day. It was the day on which her belief would be justified, on which the seal of certainty would be set upon all her inner hopes. Cecil would come back to-day. She lay for a moment motionless, trying to realise all that it meant.

It was true that she had been virtually living with him, sharing his life all this time, but between the life of dreams and the life of the waking hours is a great gulf fixed. It is not that one is necessarily less real than the other. Simply, there is so wide a gap between the two

Etelyn Hastings

that, when in the heart of one, it is difficult to realise the reality of the other. Moreover, she had grown accustomed to this double life of hers now. It seemed natural to leap over the dark gulf of sleep each night and join him; but to have him back with her in the ordinary practical life of every day—this would be deliciously surprising and wonderful.

Suddenly a cold chill of doubt rushed over her, and she sank down on the side of the bed which she had just risen from, drawing her dressing-gown close round her and shivering. Suppose, after all, she had had only a series of vivid dreams; suppose, after all, he should not come back to-day, nor the next, nor the next; that day after day would stretch on and slowly she would grow to believe that he was dead, as all the rest did. She had prayed for dreams—dreams had been sent her. She had also prayed that he should come back. She had linked her prayers about him, and had hoped that they would make chain armour to protect

The Religion of

an evil. Well, that still might be. He might be safe, he might be well, he might eventually return to her; but if her dreams were only dreams, then he might not come that day.

Still, with all this she thoroughly expected him, and as soon as she came up from breakfast she went to her wardrobe and got out, herself, the rose silk gown she had had made a few weeks previously, and laid it out on the bed. Just as she did so, Lady Hastings came into the room.

"What are you getting that out for, Evelyn?" she asked; "you can't wear it!"

"I like to see a pretty colour sometimes," returned Evelyn, crossly, her whole blood filled with nervous irritation and revolt. How it had lived in her veins week after week of this terrible life she had lived, and now how its fire seemed to flame in proportion as the moment of her release drew nearer!

She resolutely turned away from her mother

Evelyn Hastings

and proceeded to draw out some lace skirts and put them beside the dress on the bed. Then she went to her dressing-table and got out a set of pearls, lace for her neck, and other trifles, exactly as if she were preparing to make her toilet. She recognised it would be impossible to spare Durham the sight of her mourning, that she must see him first in that; but her idea was to throw it aside immediately it was possible, ignominious, oppressive, shameful as it seemed to her in the idea it represented.

"Really, Evelyn, you grow very childish," said her mother.

Evelyn shrugged her shoulders, and, with her back to the room, counted out some bangles for her wrists. As the hours of the day passed, her torment of agonised expectation and suspense grew till she felt she must suffocate beneath the burden of concealment. Her throat closed absolutely against all food, so that at luncheon she sat white and dry-lipped, enduring the bitter railleries of her mother in silence.

The Religion of

Directly the form was over, she slipped away and up to her room, there to sit at intervals on the side of her bed trembling from head to foot in a sudden access of mistrust, at others to walk up and down devoured by wild impatience and watching the clock, set to a quarter of a minute, with strained eyes.

Half-an-hour before the appointed time she went downstairs. She knew that her mother was receiving that day, and that there would be more or less of her acquaintances gathered in the drawing-room. Here was where she wished the meeting to be, before the eyes of these people who had scoffed at her beliefs, who had derided her ideas, who had tortured her with their consolations, who had taken such pains to prove the imbecility of her faith, to remove every vestige of her hope. She descended slowly, her brain almost bursting with its hopes and longing, but her heart swelling triumphantly with the thought of her approaching freedom.

Evelyn Hastings

"How soon now I shall be away from all these shallow fools!" she thought delightedly, as she neared the bottom stair.

She would appeal to Durham to take her away at once, that very night. Secretly she had made her preparations; in the lower-locked division of her armoire was placed ready a little valise that contained all her treasures.

Yes, she was happy. It was over at last, and she would be with him again, under the influence of that soothing comfort, his voice, feeling all the bleeding wounds of her mind closing as his hand touched hers.

She entered the room and found, as she had anticipated, most of the fauteuils, chairs, and sofas ornamented (or the reverse) with human beings of different sizes, shapes, and colours, that she knew. She lent her hand to some, her cheek to others, and then installed herself on a far couch by one of the windows. She wondered whether the beating of her heart would be observed under

The Religion of

her black bodice, it seemed to rise and fall with such terrific thuds to herself, and she put her hand to her throat and pinched it; it was so dry, it seemed as if it must crack when she spoke.

Among other arrivals, Maud Stevens entered the room, radiant and self-possessed. Evelyn was glad to think she would be present when Durham came. She had not planned it, had not thought of it, but since it had so turned out, she was glad. She gazed at the girl as she came up. Maud was looking wonderfully pretty. Her eyes were softened and deeper in colour, and while her freckles were still there, the rose flush on both cheeks obscured, eclipsed them. Evelyn knew at once from her face what had happened. She went to meet her, and Maud seized her hand; then, after kissing her, eagerly drew her away with her to one of the windows.

"Only think, Evelyn! it has happened I'm engaged! Isn't it lovely?"

Evelyn Hastings

Evelyn smiled. "I am so glad. Who is it?" It seemed strange to her, with her own nature, that Maud should mention the fact before the man's name. But Maud is the common type. To most people, solid advantages, positions, things, mean more than emotions or persons.

"Why, Lieutenant Jenkins. You introduced him, you remember, one afternoon when I was here," Maud answered hastily, drawing off her gloves and displaying a pretty little engagement ring with much pride.

Evelyn had never had an engagement ring, and had never thought about it.

"And do you know, Evelyn," pursued Maud, talking very rapidly, afraid lest some one should interrupt them in the curtained alcove where they had taken refuge, "it was all so funny: it turned out just exactly as you said, and I'm always going to believe after this, for there must be something in it. I never saw Dick at all for weeks after I met him here,

The Religion of

and I was so awfully miserable, and the freckles were worse than ever. Well, one afternoon I was up in my room alone, and there was a glass just under my window. I was feeling so bad, I can't tell you, I thought I never should find any one to like me, and I went and looked in the glass. You never could believe how dreadful I looked. The face seemed full of lines, just a mass of them. I suppose it was the worry and all the feeling ill. I was terrified, and then I thought it couldn't be at twenty-one. No one has lines at twenty-one, do they? I thought it must be imagination. But they were there—really. Well, I got in such a state of mind, Evelyn, I thought I was going mad. Then I remembered all you'd said, and I just flung myself on the floor and prayed, and prayed, and prayed as hard as I could. I just said over and over again,—‘Let me be engaged; even if it's only that; just let me be engaged once before I get old or die.’ Do you see? I felt so bad, and I just lay there”

Evelyn Hastings

and cried, and cried, and cried and prayed, all the afternoon. I did not seem to care what happened to me. I lay there and the floor smelt of dust, and the flue got in my hair, and I was too miserable to care about anything. I thought I'd stop there till God heard me. And then it was so funny—of course only a coincidence, I suppose, but still—a knock came at my door and the maid said outside:

“Lieutenant Jenkins to see you, miss; and I've showed him into the drawing-room.”

“I said, ‘Very well, I'll come down.’ What else could I say, as he was there? And I got up. You should have seen me. I looked dreadful. Eyes so red! and face so dirty! and hair! I washed my face as quick as I could, and did my hair, and then I came down. I'd kept him waiting a tremendous time, but he didn't seem to mind. He was so nice, and we had a lovely time, and I gave him tea. Well, he came and saw me a number of times after that, and there it is,

The Religion of

now we're engaged. Somehow I couldn't help thinking of you and all you'd said, and I thought you'd be glad to hear all about it."

"I am indeed, dear; I'm so very, very glad," Evelyn answered, her eyes full of emotional tears as she pressed her friend's hands.

The simple revelation of Maud's suffering moved her. The common, common tale of girl-life and girl-suffering going on day by day, year by year, throughout all England.

"But do you know, Evelyn," went on Maud, "I feel so sorry now that I did not ask for marriage while I was about it? I only prayed to be 'engaged,' and I feel afraid that's all perhaps that will be given me; and now, you see, I feel how dreadful it would be if I lost Dick. He has nothing but his pay, and I'm afraid we shan't be able to marry for ages and ages. Isn't it stupid?"

"Ye," said Evelyn, slowly. "You should always pray for exactly what you want. I

Evelyn Hastings

have so often noticed myself, in little things, that just what I had asked for was given, and nothing else; and often I have prayed for things I found I did not like at all when I got them. But then, of course, one must abide by one's own words, by one's own choice. Sometimes, too, the mere wording of the prayer is answered, the spirit of it gets quite lost. You must be careful as to what you ask and pray for in that desperate way."

"What shall I do now?" returned Maud, helplessly.

"Perhaps I can help you. I know I have money of my own, but I suppose it's most of it Cecil's, now. You see, we were married in such a hurry, I don't really know what arrangements were made, and I've never thought about it; but I will ask Cecil when he comes back."

"When Cecil comes back?" repeated Maud, her face, that had lightened at Evelyn's first words, falling.

The Religion of

"Oh, I forgot," said Evelyn, laughing. "You didn't know. Well, he is coming back. He will be here this afternoon."

"How do you know?"

"Well, for one thing, I feel it," returned Evelyn, and Maud stared at her changing face. "I can feel when he is coming towards me. He is on his way to me now. I am quite sure of it. Do you know, Maud, there is such a sympathy between him and me, that just after we were married, and I was waiting for him in Jermyn Street, I used to know when he came into the street. Something drew me towards the window or the door at the moment when he was coming or when he was there; even when he used to come back earlier, long before I expected him."

"But how do you account for it?"

"I think perhaps I have a peculiarly sensitive system—at least, to some influences. Cecil has an influence upon me, mental and physical. I can feel and realise and be sensible of that."

Evelyn Hastings

influence through a long distance—that's all it amounts to, I suppose."

I think it's very extraordinary!"

"Not more than wireless telegraphy and all those things. It is a form of telepathy, I think, and I am a good subject. Look here, Maud, I think it's something like this: just speaking roughly, I believe that every human being, as he walks about, is surrounded by a cloud, as it were, of influences emanating from himself. These are not perceptible, not traceable, not recognisable by most people, except in a vague way—they know they are attracted to some people and repelled by others. Well, when a person enters the room, say, all these influences rush into it before him, affecting every one already there. They seize upon some suitable personalities and draw them towards their originator, and they buffet against others and repel them.

"Of course, very, characterless, mediocre people have weaker influences. They could

The Religion of

not affect the most sensitive personality. And again there are people so dense, so heavy, with their nerves and senses so buried under their flesh, that no influence, however strong, can affect them. As for me, I am dreadfully conscious of the influences that surround and emanate from everybody; so much so, that sometimes when people come into the room, their voice, their expression, their everything jars upon me so, that I feel quite sick, ill, really ill, and if they *don't*, I *have* to leave the place. Of course it's not very often, but it does happen sometimes. With other people I feel so strongly, so strangely attracted to them. They draw me to them, rule me. It's so with Cecil. He has such an immense influence over me, not mentally so much as physically. One evening, for instance, I asked him to will that I should do something. I just wanted to see how it would work, you know, I was standing up at one end of the room, he was at the other.

Evelyn Hastings

I closed my eyes. He did not touch me, he was not near me. Well, though I had been feeling quite well, a terrible feeling of fatigue came over me suddenly, next a tremendous desire to sink down, sit down, then a clawing sort of feeling in my sides, as if some one were dragging at me, pulling at me to sit down. And somehow—to show you how physical and not mental the influence was—the idea never occurred to my brain that that was what he wanted me to do. I resisted the impulse to sit down all I could, though it was a terrible struggle, and stood waiting, expecting every minute to have some mental impulse to do something. Well, I felt so bad at last, and nothing came into my head, that I said I would give it up, and opened my eyes. Then I asked him what he had been willing me to do, and he laughed and said:

“‘I simply willed you to sit down! It doesn't seem to work very well.’”

The Religion of

"But that's hypnotism, that's a well-known thing," said Maud, watching her curiously.

"In a way: but something more as well, because you see I was not looking at him, not touching him, not near him. Nor did the suggestion come to me mentally. His will, apparently, had some effect upon the atmosphere surrounding me and affected me physically through a considerable distance. It seems that the limits of space through which one can be affected are unknown. Cecil is at this moment, I'm sure, coming towards me, thinking of me, 'willing' to see me. I feel it. The influence of his mind is affecting me, just as it did in that room, only the influence is transmitted through a longer distance. And though the distance is greater, the force is greater, for Cecil is probably wishing very hard now to see me, and has been for a long time. Will power is probably cumulative. In the room he only thought about my sitting down, and willed it in a careless way for a

Evelyn Hastings

few minutes. He will be here now in a little while."

"No; you are not serious."

"Wait and see! Only don't say anything about it now. I want it to be a surprise for mamma, for every one. And don't worry about your own marriage; it will be all right about the money." She stepped from behind the curtain and looked across the room at the clock.

"It's nearly time," she whispered in Maud's ear. "I'm going to sit down over there, I'm so tired."

With a smile and a nod she left Maud at the window and went back to her couch, from which she could see the whole room. When she reached it she found the conversation had drifted on to religious matters.

"I always do pray, I must say, if I want anything badly, even if it's only a new cook," remarked Lady Craven meditatively; "but I

The Religion of

can't profess that I think my prayers will have much effect."

Evelyn smiled.

"You remind me of a clergyman in New York," she said mischievously. "Do you want to hear about him?"

Lady Craven looked at Evelyn a little suspiciously. She strongly disapproved of young people quizzing their elders, but Evelyn looked innocent enough, and moreover, continued softly without waiting for permission.

"Well, he was an enthusiastic pro-temperance, or rather pro-total abstinence, preacher, and one day, to his alarm and dismay, he discovered a certain company in his parish were building a gorgeous saloon—that is, public-house. He remonstrated in vain with them. Finally, when all efforts to stay the horrid calamity had failed, he convened his congregation and held special services daily, invoking the curse of God upon

Evelyn Hastings

the building and praying Him to demolish it. During these a terrific thunderstorm occurred, the unfinished building was struck by lightning, and totally destroyed, whereupon the ungodly syndicate demonstrated their faith in prayer by immediately suing him for damages, 50,000 dollars, on the ground that his prayers had been answered to their detriment. And what do you think the clergyman did?"

"I'm sure I have no idea," replied the old lady, sulkily.

"He defended the suit, that's all," returned Evelyn dryly, "and hired counsel to demonstrate that his prayers could not possibly have had anything to do with it!"

"Well, I think it is very well to go to church and so on," put in Lady Hastings, "and to pray, of course, and make the responses in church, but I can't say that I carry my beliefs to the ridiculous extent that Evelyn does. You believe," she added, turning to her daughter, "if you fell upon your knees now

The Religion of

and asked for something, it would be given to you."

"No," returned Evelyn from her sofa, white and composed; "but if I pray passionately and with my whole soul, day after day, night after night, for weeks, and months, and years, I believe I shall attain it eventually."

This speech, uttered with intense energy, was rather "much" for those present. Not one of them had ever conceived the idea of such a laborious proceeding as Evelyn suggested. No one ventured to argue upon what might or might not happen if you went to such lengths as that, but Lady Hastings, with the invariable instinct of a weak arguer, brought the question on to a personal ground.

"But look at your own prayers for your husband. They have not brought him back!"

Evelyn raised her eyes to the clock; it was just the half-hour. There was a questioning pause in the conversation. Those present waited to hear what Evelyn would answer.

Evelyn Hastings

Her lips did not move. Her whole soul gave itself to one prayer, one hope, that God would answer for her, that she and her belief might be justified for His Name's sake.

No one spoke, and in the hush the door was opened a little—slowly and silently and unannounced Durham walked into the room. Lady Hastings shrieked and fell back fainting in her arm-chair, two or three of the women present became very pale, but Durham glanced at no one. His eyes were fixed on his widow, seated on the far sofa, muffled in her heavy black draperies and veil. His brows contracted for an instant, then he smiled as he noted the rounded contours of the face, unravaged by grief or care or anxiety, only overflowing with faith and confident love and triumphant joy.

She rose and went to meet him, and oblivious of everything but him, she twined her arms about his neck and lifted her glowing face.

"I have been expecting you so long," she

The Religion of

said softly but distinctly, and then some of the other women screamed hysterically and followed Lady Hastings's example.

"It was all so horrible," they explained later; "so ghastly, so ghostly. She met him just as if she knew where he'd been all the time."

The stronger-minded of those present said nothing; they looked and listened.

"And your poor hand," continued Evelyn, "is none the worse, is it?"

She turned up his left wrist and exposed the red scar on the under side.

"I rather expected you yesterday," she pursued, "but of course I could not be sure."

Durham's arms were tightly interlaced as he strained her closer and closer to him. The room for him was empty save for her.

She looked up at him, waves of light and colour seeming to pass over her changing face. "I want you to take me away at once," she said. "I am quite ready; I packed yester-

Evelyn Hastings

day. When I saw the ship was in at noon, I thought you would get the two train from Southampton, and be here at five."

Every one agreed it was horrible for a dead husband to be received like that, even if his widow had prayed and all that. It seemed so irreligious. And, to her immense relief, no one called upon her for quite a little while afterwards.

THE END.

NOVELS WITH GREAT CIRCULATIONS.

An Actual Life Experience.

THE NEW DELILAH!

By ELEANORE S. TERRY.

Price 6s.

WHAT THE REVIEWERS SAY:—

"We could not lay the volume down till we had finished it, so breathless were we as to the issue. Sins are called sins, not excuses. The moral is educating: the agony of remorse could have been a study for Coleridge. Again, we say this is an exceptionally well-written and subtly constructed novel."—*Perthshire Courier*.

"It is one of the most powerful and appalling essays in fiction we have ever come across."—*Lloyd's News*.

"The final scenes are depicted with a rare beauty and self-restraint. The creation of the heroine herself is one of which any living writer might well be proud. Her self-told tale is a human document of high distinction."—*The Court Journal*.

"No one can read the book without his outlook on humanity being broadened and his insight into human weakness being made more distinct."—*Nottingham Daily Express*.

"It is certainly a striking piece of work."—*Manchester Courier*

THE WALTER SCOTT PUBLISHING COMPANY, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BELLING-ON-TYNE.

Paula : A Sketch from Life.

BY VICTORIA CROSS.

Price 6s.

What the Reviewers say:—

Daily Chronicle—

"We strongly recommend every one to read it for no book better worth reading has so far come under our notice in the present season."

Morning Leader—

"It is so full of glow and charm, so aflame with the enthusiasm of art and love, that there can be little else left for the reader when he has finished the volume save a feeling of warm gratitude for a daring and successful plunge into some of the depths of a passionate woman's heart."

Saturday Review—

"The book carries one along with it, and fascinates one almost against one's better judgment. Victoria Cross has a fervid energy, kept in check by a sense of humour, which has made her book in parts vital and throughout attractive."

Queen—

"I have only given the book so much space because I see in Victoria Cross the possibilities of a future Marie Corelli."

THE WALTER SCOTT PUBLISHING CO., LTD.

LONDON AND FELLING-ON-TYNE

A Girl of the Klondike.

By VICTORIA CROSS.

Price 3s. 6d.

the Reviewers say:—

The Glasgow Herald—

“A thoroughly interesting story.”

The Weekly Sun—

“Our real sympathies are enlisted by *A Girl of the Klondike*.”

The Academy—

“A novel by the author of *The Woman who Didn't*. The story contains plenty of climate, gold dust, and gore.”

The Manchester Guardian—

“It is not given to all of us to be able to take a trip to Klondyke, but we can recommend this book as an excellent substitute.”

The Star—

“The character of the very original heroine is painfully obvious when we learn that a certain little excitement quite delighted and pleased Katrine.”

The Glasgow Daily Record—

“Victoria Cross gives us a most readable story.”

THE WALTER SCOTT PUBLISHING CO., LTD.,
LONDON AND FELLING-ON-TYNE

The Religion of Evelyn Hastings.

By VICTORIA CROSS,

Author of "Six Chapters of a Man's Life," &c.

Price 5s.

What the Reviewers say:—

The King and His Navy and Army—

"A study of passion, but it is passion that ennobles and brings happiness. . . . The sincerity and simplicity of this story make it certainly the pleasantest to read of any of this author's books."

St. James's Gazette—

"Full of life; many sound ideas."

The Sunday Times—

"Its value is that it is a human document."

The Publishers' Circular—

"It is a pretty little love story."

The Sheffield Independent—

"Victoria Cross writes with a powerful and descriptive pen."

Oxford Review—

"The book is intensely interesting."

The Standard—

"Very well done."

The Queen—

"Victoria Cross has a remarkably clever and expressive pen."

Perthshire Courier—

"The sketch is beautifully written."

THE WALTER SCOTT PUBLISHING CO., LTD.,
LONDON AND FELLING-ON-TYNE.

"A BOOK THAT HAS NEVER BEEN SURPASSED."

The Lord of the Dark Red Star

*Being the Story of the Supernatural
Influences in the Life of an Italian
Despot of the Thirteenth Century.*

BY EUGENE LEE HAMILTON.

Price 6s.

At the Reviewers say :—

Literary World—

"*The Lord of the Dark Red Star* is that rare corner, a novel upon which it is possible without reserve to congratulate the author. . . . The occasional introduction of Sin and Death, gambling with dice for Ezeli, is extraordinarily effective."

Daily News—

"A remarkable novel by one of the few living English poets. Italy in the thirteenth century. . . . Some lovely descriptions of Sicily and the mediæval cities."

Westminster Review—

"A fascinating and wholly original romance. . . . The style is admirable; rhythmical at times, but never surcharged with colour."

Nation's Survey—

"As a truthful picture of the cruelty and superstition of the times, the book has never been surpassed, and perhaps has rarely been equalled."

THE WALTER SCOTT PUBLISHING CO., LTD.,
LONDON AND FELLING-ON-TYNE

AN EXTRAORDINARY ROMANCE
OF CHINESE LIFE.

Sin Chong (The Faithful Heart).

BY W. BRAUNSTON JONES.

Price 3s. 6d.

What the Reviewers say:—

Pall Mall Gazette—

"The story is a perfect 'Inquire Within' on the subject of Chinese customs, a book full of the most interesting information, through which a tale of love and intrigue runs its exciting course."

Literary World—

"Mr. Jones has a fertile imagination, and the account he gives of Yuon's visit to the house of pleasure is a proof of it."

The Star—

"There is a sharp flavour in *Sin Chong*. It bites."

Week's Survey—

"The descriptions are full and interesting; the execution, the banquet, the dip into the abyss of the poor, the prison, and the house of pleasure."

Bristol Mercury—

"The result is a story which is full of excitement, and has a kind of grim fascination for the reader."

Newcastle Journal—

"Will be eagerly read as a tale with incident, character, and colour, all possessing freshness."

THE WALTER SCOTT PUBLISHING CO., LTD
LONDON AND FELLING-ON-TYNE

MRS. L. T. MEADE'S
PROBLEM-NOVEL EFFORT.

The Other Woman.

BY MRS. L. T. MEADE.

Price 6s.

What the Reviewers say:

Publishers' Circular—

"In this novel Mrs. Meade penetrates more deeply beneath the surface of human life than is her wont."

The Examiner—

"It is a novel which deals with a very serious moral problem—one in which the author expresses herself from the woman's point of view with no uncertain note."

Daily Mail—

"Mrs. Meade sets herself to study a very serious social problem. It is a problem that is favourite alike with playwright and novelist—the question of whether a man has a right to a 'past.'"

Newcastle Journal—

"*The Other Woman* is an able piece of work, with a plot that is carefully worked out, and some fine characters, as well as striking features of modern life."

Windsor and Eton Express—

"The book is written in finished style, and the interest is well maintained throughout. It should prove a popular publication."

Southend Echo—

"The book is well worth reading from cover to cover, and I do not think that any one will regret having read it."

THE WALTER SCOTT PUBLISHING CO., LTD.,
LONDON AND LONDON-TYNE

**GEORGE MOORE'S
GREAT NOVELS.**

Esther Waters.

Price 6s.

The Athenæum—

"It is an immense composition, planned and developed with infinite patience and skill; it is faultless in construction, packed with human knowledge and direct observation; it is founded on the elemental human affections, the love of mother for child; it works out great moral ideas."

Celibates.

Price 6s.

The Times—

"Excessively clever."

The Daily News—

"These studies are amazingly clever."

The Literary World—

"In *Celibates* Mr. Moore has given us a sympathetic and masterly analysis of temperament."

A Drama in Muslin.

Price 3s. 6d.

The Pall Mall Gazette—

"Mr. George Moore's work stands on a very much higher plane than the facile fiction of the circulating libraries. . . . The characters are drawn with patient care, and with a power of individualisation which marks the born novelist. It is a serious, powerful, and in many respects an edifying book."

THE WALTER SCOTT PUBLISHING CO., LTD.,
LONDON AND WELLING-ON-TYNE

GEORGE MOORE'S GREAT NOVELS—continued.

A Modern Lover.

Price 3s. 6d.

The Spectator—

"It would be difficult to praise too highly the strength, truth, delicacy, and pathos of the incident of Gwynnie Lloyd, and the admirable treatment of the great sacrifice she makes."

A Mummer's Wife.

Price 3s. 6d.

The Athenæum—

"... No one who wishes to examine the subject of realism in fiction, with regard to English novels, can afford to neglect *A Mummer's Wife*."

The Spectator—

"*A Mummer's Wife*, in virtue of its vividness of presentation and real literary skill, may be regarded as in some degree a representative example of the work of a literary school that has of late years attracted to itself a great deal of notoriety."

Vain Fortune.

Price 3s. 6d.

The Speaker—

"Of extreme interest and suggestiveness, and the characters of the three principal personages are drawn with that delicate skill which bespeaks the master of his art."

The North British Daily Mail—

"A powerful story, realistic in the true and not merely repulsive sense, and peopled with living characters consistently drawn."

THE WALTER SCOTT PUBLISHING CO., LTD.,

LONDON AND FELL 3-ON-TYNE

New Novel by the Author of "Millet and
the Barbizon School."

Many Waters.

BY ARTHUR TOMSON.

Price 6s.

What the Reviewers say:

Scotsman—

"The story is gracefully written throughout. It will find its best pleased readers among those who like a novel to be artistic."

Morning Leader—

"Written with great distinction, and has about it a very pleasant atmosphere of peace and restfulness, in spite of the strong passion which is its central motive."

Liverpool Mercury—

"The book contains some very pleasant descriptive touches."

Northern Whig—

"A quiet but picturesquely-written story, told with very considerable charm. This book really contains work of a high class."

Week's Survey—

"The book is a firm piece of work."

Nottingham Guardian—

"A charmingly written story."

St. James's Gazette—

"The book is well written."

THE WALTER SCOTT PUBLISHING CO., LTD.
LONDON AND FELLING-ON-TYNE.

A SWEDISH AUTHOR'S MASTER-PIECE.

Singoalia: A Mediæval Legend

By VIKTOR RYDBERG,

Late Fellow of the Royal Swedish Academy.

Beautifully Illustrated, Small 4to, Cloth, Gilt
Top, Price 6s.

What the Reviewers say;

The Athenæum—

"It possesses the genuine qualities of romance in a very high degree. It stirs the imagination, rouses the sympathy, and envelops us from beginning to end in its own peculiar atmosphere. . . . The illustrations also claim a word of notice; they are unusually clever."

The Literary World—

"Dr. Rydberg's style is crisp, with occasionally a preference for short paragraphs; but the descriptions of scene and emotions are rich and vivid. . . . Only such a past-master in the study of those conflicting times could so well have drawn the popular feeling and beliefs concerning the old and the new faiths."

The Daily Chronicle—

"*Singoalia*, which is rightly described as a mediæval legend-story, is an interesting piece of work. . . . The book is admirably got up, and its interest and value are enhanced by the striking drawings of an artist whose name is not discovered."

The Manchester Guardian—

"The characters are excellently drawn, and the atmosphere of the forest and the events of the remote and wild life are thoroughly understood and well expressed."

THE WALTER SCOTT PUBLISHING CO., LTD.,
LONDON AND FELLING-ON TYNE

The Music Story Series.

A SERIES OF LITERARY-MUSICAL MONOGRAPHS.

Edited by **FREDERICK J. CROVEST,**

Author of "The Great Tone Poets," etc., etc.

Illustrated with Photogravure and Collotype Portraits, Half-tone and Line Pictures, Facsimiles, etc.

Square Crown 8vo, Cloth, 3s. 6d. net.

VOLUMES NOW READY.

THE STORY OF ORATORIO. By ANNIE W. PATTERSON, B.A., Mus. Doc.

THE STORY OF NOTATION. By C. F. ABDY WILLIAMS, M.A., Mus. Bac.

THE STORY OF THE ORGAN. By C. F. ABDY WILLIAMS, M.A., Author of "Bach" and "Handel" ("Master Musicians' Series").

THE STORY OF CHAMBER MUSIC. By N. KILBURN, Mus. Bac. (Cantab.).

THE STORY OF THE VIOLIN. By PAUL STOEVIING, Professor of the Violin, Guildhall School of Music, London.

THE STORY OF THE HARP. By WILLIAM H. GRATTAN FLOOD, Author of "History of Irish Music."

THE STORY OF ORGAN MUSIC. By C. F. ABDY WILLIAMS, M.A., Mus. Bac.

THE STORY OF ENGLISH MUSIC (1604-1904): being the Worshipful Company of Musicians' Lectures.

THE STORY OF MINSTRELSY. By EDMONDSTOUNE DUNCAN.

THE STORY OF MUSICAL FORM. By CLARENCE LUGAS.

THE STORY OF OPERA. By E. MARKHAM LEE, Mus. Doc.

IN PREPARATION.

THE STORY OF THE PIANOFORTE. By ALGERNON S. ROSE, Author of "Talks with Bandmen."

THE STORY OF MUSICAL SOUND. By CHURCHILL SIBLEY, Mus. Doc.

THE WALTER SCOTT PUBLISHING COMPANY, LIMITED,
LONDON AND FELLING ON-TYNE.

Musicians' Wit, Humour, 3/6 and Anecdote: 3/6

BEING

ON THE LIVES OF COMPOSERS, SINGERS, AND
INSTRUMENTALISTS OF ALL TIMES.

BY

FREDERICK J. CROWEST,

Author of "The Great Tone Poets," Editor of "The Master
Musicians" Series, "The Music Story" Series, etc., etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY J. P. DONNE.

What the Reviewers say:

"The volume is the best collection of musical anecdotes
that we have."—*Musical Opinion*.

"This is distinctly a book to acquire. It is thoroughly
readable."—*Sunday Times*.

"One of those delightful medleys which you can take up
at any moment."—*T. P.'s Weekly*.

"One of the most interesting and entertaining books of
the season."—*Leicester Post*.

"One of the books which should not be missed."—
Sporting and Dramatic News.

"Brims full of fun and joviality. It is a book worth
having."—*Churchwoman*.

"A most readable and entertaining book."—*Glasgow
Leader*.

"An amusing book, and a mine of wealth for diners-
out."—*Field*.

"Has a striking resemblance to the ever-delightful
Thackerayana."—*Scott Journal*.

"It will delight the general reader."—*Publishers'
Circular*.

THE WALTER SCOTT PUBLISHING CO., LTD.,
LONDON AND WELLING-ON-TYNE

The Walter Scott Publishing Co., Ltd.,

LONDON (PATERNOSTER SQUARE, E.C.) AND PELLING-ON-TYNE.

EDUCATIONAL WORKS.

- HOW TO WRITE A Manual of Composition and Letter Writing. 6^d.
 HOW TO DEBATE. With Hints on Public Speaking. 6^d.
 ELOCUTION. By T. R. W. Pearson, M.A., of St. Catharine's College, Cambridge, and F. W. Waithman, Lecturers on Elocution.

EUROPEAN CONVERSATION BOOKS.

Handy Pocket Size.

- FRENCH CONVERSATION BOOK. 1/-
 ITALIAN CONVERSATION BOOK. 1/-
 SPANISH CONVERSATION BOOK.
 GERMAN CONVERSATION BOOK.
 NORWEGIAN CONVERSATION BOOK.

"RATIONAL STUDY OF MODERN LANGUAGES" SERIES.

- ITALIAN GRAMMAR. By Luigi Ricci.
 FIRST FRENCH COURSE (PART I.). By Jacques Coquelin.
 SECOND FRENCH COURSE (PART II.). By Jacques Coquelin. 2/6
 Net. FIRST GERMAN COURSE (PART I.). By Jacques Coquelin. 2/6
 Net. SECOND GERMAN COURSE (PART II.). By Jacques Coquelin.
 FIRST ITALIAN GRAMMAR (PART I.). By Jacques Coquelin.
 MORCEAUX CHOISIS DE LITTÉRATURE FRANÇAISE. By G. H. Marchat. 2/6
 Net. THE PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF ENGLAND. (Vol. I.—From Ancient Britain to the last English King.) By Robert Anchor Thompson, M.A. Crown 8vo, Cloth. 270 pages. 2/6
 Net.

ELSWICK SCIENCE SERIES.

- PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL TRIGONOMETRY. By Henry Evers, LL.D., Author of "Steam," etc. 3/6
 MANUAL OF STEAM AND PRIME MOVERS. By Henry Evers, LL.D., Author of "Steam," "Navigation," etc. 3/6
 DESCRIPTIVE GEOMETRY. By T. H. Eagles, M.A.

THE "TWO READINGS" SERIES.

- Crown 8vo, Cloth. Each vol. set in the Original and Translation Type.
 PETRONIUS: CNA TRIMALCHIONIS. Translated from the Latin, with an Introduction, by Michael J. Ryan. 3/6
 DANTE'S LA DIVINA COMMEDIA (The Divine Comedy: Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven). Translated by Prof. Luigi Ricca.
 MODERN ORGANIC CHEMISTRY. By C. A. Keane, D.Sc., Ph.D., F.I.C. 520 pp. With Diagrams. 6/-

Of every Bookseller, or direct from the Publishers.

The Walter Scott Publishing Co., Ltd.,

LONDON (PATERNOSTER SQUARE, E.C.) AND FELLING-ON-TYNE.

SCIENTIFIC WORKS.

1/- ON THE STRUCTURE AND DISTRIBUTION OF CORAL REEFS. (Darwin.) 1/-

2/6 Net. PSYCHISM. By M. Hume. Crown 8vo, 160 pages. 2/6 Net.

2/6 THE SCIENCE OF FAIRY TALES. By E. Sidney Hartland. 3/6

3/6 MODERN METEOROLOGY. By Frank Waldo. 3/6
With 112 Illustrations.

3/6 THE GROWTH OF THE BRAIN. By Henry Herbert Donaldson, Professor of Neurology in Chicago University. 3/6

5/- EVOLUTION OF MATTER. By Dr. Gustave le Bon. 5/-

5/- PSYCHOLOGY OF ALCOHOLISM. By Rev. G. B. Cullen. 5/-

5/- THOUGHTS ON NATURAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE ORIGIN OF LIFE. By A. Biddellcombe. 90 pages. 5/-

6/- AN INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE PSYCHOLOGY. By Professor C. Lloyd Morgan, F.R.S. With Diagrams. Revised Edition. 6/-

6/- THE NEW PSYCHOLOGY. By E. W. Scripture, Ph.D. With 124 Illustrations. 6/-

6/- THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE EMOTIONS. By Th. Ribot, Professor at the College of France. 6/-

6/- A STUDY OF RECENT EARTHQUAKES. By Charles Davison, D.Sc., F.G.S. With Illustrations. 6/-

6/- THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION. By Edwin Diller Starbuck, Ph.D.,eland Sanford Junior University. 6/-

7/6 RACE CULTURE; OR, RACE SUICIDE. By Robert H. Rentoul. 7/6

10/6 NEW SCIENCE OF CAUSATION. By H. Croft Hiller. 10/6

Of every Bookseller, or direct from the Publishers.

THE Sensation in Fiction.

SIX CHAPTERS OF A MAN'S LIFE.

By VICTORIA CROSS, 6/-

Author of "The Woman Who Didn't," "A Girl of the Klondike,"
"Paula," "Anna Lombard."

PRESS NOTICES

"An extravagant and sensuous work, for which the author claims a high moral purpose."—*Time*.

"Cleverly written and cleverly imagined."—*Scottishman*.

"Never dull; intensely dramatic."—*Daily News*.

"Victoria Cross is a writer of genius. *Six Chapters of a Man's Life* is a difficult book to forget. There will be much censure against it, but there is no mistaking the sombre earnestness of the morality which it enforces. It is a drama rather than a novel, and a sermon rather than a drama. It is a sombre and somewhat abhorrent contrast and complement of *Anna Lombard*."—*Review of Reviews*.

"Victoria Cross has a vivid imagination: the powers displayed in *Anna Lombard* and *The Woman Who Didn't* are present in abundance."—*Liverpool Mercury*.

"We acknowledge the uncommon literary ability displayed in the book."—*Aberdeen Free Press*.

"A daring story, in clever story. We acknowledge the ability of the author."—*Birmingham Post*.

THE WALTER SCOTT PUBLISHING CO., LTD.

LONDON AND FELLING-ON-TYNE

